

Ecumenical Studies Series

VOL. IV

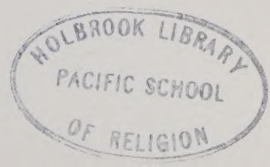
SEPTEMBER, 1958

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The Ecumenical Studies Series is an occasional publication of the Council on Christian Unity, bringing to the attention of members and friends significant materials on ecumenical issues. Single copies are distributed to members free of charge. Additional copies are available at cost. Membership is \$3.00 per year.



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PRESUPPOSITIONS AND PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATIONS

This series of consultations has been planned

to consider the main ecumenical issues now before Disciples, or likely in the next few years, and to project principles and alternatives for action, thought and study.

PRESUPPOSITIONS

The consultations are projected on the basis of some specific presuppositions:

1. that as Disciples of Christ we are committed to the local congregation as the working base of the *Una Sancta*, but not the only nor in itself adequate manifestation of the Church Universal;
2. that as local congregations we are committed to cooperation in local and regional councils of churches, but do not hold these to be the final and fullest form of unity;
3. that as a people of common interests and with a specific responsibility in North America and abroad, we are committed to the Brotherhood as an instrument of fellowship and fulfilment, but not the only, nor the fullest instrument of fellowship and ministry;
4. that as a communion we are committed to the fellowship of churches in the National and World Councils of Churches, and to other organizations in the ecumenical movement, but we press on toward fuller and more adequate realizations of the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church;
5. that as children of one God we are committed ultimately to the realization of one Church, one body, one faith, that this world may believe in one God;

and to this end, these consultations are planned to consider *our* responsibility and direct our efforts.

PURPOSES

For convenience of discussion and conference agenda, this central purpose may be sharpened into five main questions. More detailed questions will be found following the four preparatory papers.

1. What are the important current developments in the ecumenical movement, how are they to be understood in terms of direction, what is their meaning in the long sweep of redemption-history?
2. What is the case for unity, what is the thrust behind it, how should this be articulated in contemporary theological language?
3. What is the unity Disciples hope for (cooperation? "spiritual"? organic?)? Does it have intellectual and theological integrity? Is it responsible toward the Church? What are the implications for our present structures, practices, relationships?
4. What procedures should be followed in conversing with other communions about forming a united church to ensure broadest participation and representative and responsible decisions? What basic principles should guide us in that kind of negotiation? What particular issues need our urgent study as we converse with the new United Church?
5. What is our mission beyond North America? What should be our relation to indigenous ancient churches, to union movements of younger churches, to our own mission churches? What basic principles and policies should underlie our involvements in these areas?

The consultations will seek answers to these questions. In some instances answers may take the form of specific recommendations, or areas may be suggested which urgently require depth study, or additional questions may be posed for serious discussion in broader contexts of the Church Universal.

SCHEDULE OF CONSULTATIONS

Enid, Oklahoma

The Graduate Seminary of Phillips University—Nov. 11-12, 1958
For Oklahoma, Arkansas, Southern Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming
—Dean Stephen J. England, convenor

Chicago, Illinois

The Disciples Divinity House, Chicago—Nov. 18-20, 1958
For Illinois and Wisconsin—Dean W. B. Blakemore, convenor

Lynchburg, Virginia

Lynchburg College—Jan. 5-7, 1959
For New England and Capitol Areas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida—Pres. Orville W. Wake, convenor

Indianapolis, Indiana

The School of Religion, Butler University—Jan. 12-13, 1959
For Indiana, Michigan, North Ohio, Pennsylvania—Dean O. L. Shelton, convenor

Des Moines, Iowa

The Divinity School, Drake University—Feb. 16-18, 1959
For Iowa, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, North Missouri
—Dr. Loren E. Lair, convenor

Eugene, Oregon

Northwest Christian College—April, 1959
For Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, Utah—Pres. Ross Griffeth, convenor

Fort Worth, Texas

Brite College of the Bible, Texas Christian University
For Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico—Dean Elmer Henson, convenor

Lexington, Kentucky

The College of the Bible—April 7-10, 1959
For Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia, Southern Ohio—Pres. Riley B. Montgomery, convenor

Southern California

Christian Missionary Society of Southern California—Apr. 14-15, 1959
For Southern California, Arizona—Mr. James Parrott, convenor

Toronto, Canada

All Canada Committee
For Canada—Dr. Oliver W. McCully, convenor

ORGANIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

The seminary, college or regional secretary in each area, together with a small committee, has accepted responsibility for selecting participants, securing accommodations, planning the agenda, appointing speakers and study leaders, conducting the consultation and providing reports and liaison for follow-up. Delegates will be responsible for their own expenses unless otherwise specified by the area planning committee.

Participants are selected because their contribution is needed in this kind of study. A variety of points of view will be represented. The majority of participants will be pastors and professors, but representative laymen, women and youth will be included and place may be made for seminary students in larger numbers to participate in some parts of the consultations.

Each area consultation will follow its own agenda, but certain elements may be expected in all:

- common worship;
- general introductory statement of main issues;
- highlights of preparatory papers;
- brief papers on specific topics by able men of the area;
- extended periods in working groups;
- formulation of recommendations;
- appointment of liaison officer or continuation committee.

CORRELATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Each consultation is asked to appoint a reporter, secretary or scribe whose task is to relate the findings of that consultation to those of other consultations and to whatever ongoing processes may ensue. He will be asked to provide the following documents:

1. manuscripts of papers read;
2. general report and commentary on the consultation;
3. statement on agreements and disagreements with brief explanation;
4. specific findings and recommendations of the consultation;
5. list of participants.

Next steps will need to be considered when the documents from the ten consultations are in hand.

Possibilities to be considered:

- a) some form of report or reports embodying findings and best papers;
- b) a study document for local churches;
- c) an international consultation in 1959-60, together with agencies involved.

PREPARATORY STUDIES

The following four papers were written at the request of the sponsoring bodies as preparatory study materials. In July a small consultative group, including the authors, read and discussed the papers in draft form but they remain largely the work of the authors. They are not, however, finished documents. They are not intended to give answers but to delineate some important questions, to project some alternatives and to provoke discussion of issues which might lead to more representative conclusions.

In addition to these materials, delegates should be familiar with the following:

"The Disciples of Christ and Ecumenical Issues" (report of the consultation on Christian unity, Chicago, 1954), *Shane Quarterly*, January, 1955 and April, 1955.

W. E. Garrison, *Christian Unity and Disciples of Christ*, Bethany Press.

Paul Minear, *The Nature of the Unity We Seek* (official report of the Oberlin Conference), Bethany Press.

Strategy of World Missions, The United Christian Missionary Society.

"The Basis of Union," Congregational-Christian and Evangelical and Reformed Churches.

"A Plan for a United Church" (Greenwich Plan), *Ecumenical Studies Series*, July, 1957.

"Disciple Relations with Churches in Europe," *Ecumenical Studies Series*, June, 1958.

Articles in *The Christian Evangelist*.

Further materials are suggested on page 99.

As further preparation it is suggested that small work teams of participants be assigned to do spade work and possibly draft preliminary statements on the sub-topics on p. 4 prior to their area consultations.

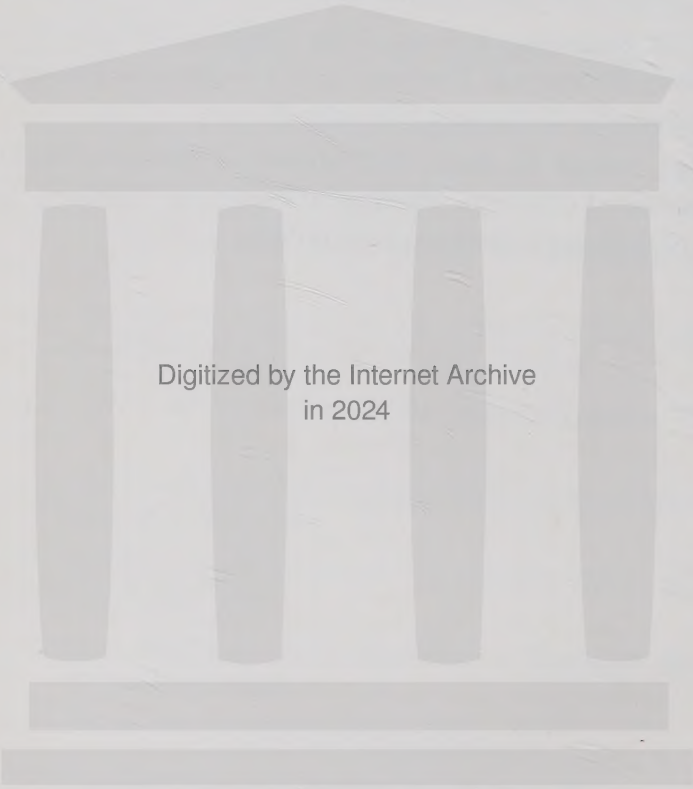
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THE IMPERATIVE FOR UNITY—A RE-STATEMENT

By LANGDON B. GILKEY

OUR conference on the unity of the Church enjoys the happy opportunity of becoming at one and the same time an aspect of the great 'Ecumenical Reformation' of our period, and also a constructive part of the oldest, and perhaps most important, element in the tradition of the Disciples of Christ. No other communion within the great Church can so find itself developing the essence of its own tradition when it encourages and discusses the 'coming together' of the churches. And yet, as we shall see, this task poses no small challenge even to Disciples; for their early understanding of unity at many points conflicts with the bases on which we at present search for that unity. We are at one with our Fathers in our goal; but we must rethink almost every important means towards it. This paper hopes to be part of that task, first through an interpretation of the contemporary call to church unity, and secondly through a contemporary reassessment of the early Disciples' understanding of that call. We are not attempting here to deal with the problem of the character and structure of union.

I

GIVEN UNITY

The unity of the Church has always been one of its major emphases. Until the present, however, this unity had always been sought through uniformity, through a leveling of the differences between Christian groups, either by exclusion or persecution, either in organizational structure or in belief. In this sense, even the early Disciples' search for unity reflected the old quest, since it sought unity through a uniform return to the 'primitive' church, if not through uniform creeds and orders. In our own time, however, a new conception of unity has appeared, new in several respects.

In the first place, this new concept of unity has appeared after, rather than before, that period which Garrison calls "complacent denominationalism." Thus in our day each communion, with some exceptions, has learned to accept other communions as at least relatively valid, and so to look on itself as at most only rela-

tively valid—as perhaps the *best* but not the *only* form of the Church. Thus, the unity now sought for is not the uniform acceptance by all others of the given form of one communion.

Secondly, this new concept of unity has come within the period in which the concepts of the historical development and the historical relativity of all things human are dominant. Thus, both the actual words of the Bible, (though not its ultimate message) and the patterns of each church group, are seen to be historically conditioned, relative to their time and place, and so not eternal and ultimate in their scope. While, therefore, the roots of the new concept of unity are in the Bible, as we shall see, unity is no longer based on the effort to restore an exact *pattern* of Church order found in the Scriptures. Because of Biblical criticism, it is agreed that there is no such single pattern in the New Testament; and because of the movement of history, that no such restoration is possible. Thus, the general movement towards unity aims to transcend particular denominational forms and patterns, rather than to seek to restore one of them. For both reasons the newer concept of unity is one which seeks to be inclusive of differences; it is unity to be sought *through* the historical variety of communal structures, not outside of that variety or of history itself. In this sense it is something new under the sun, and is probably the most important and lasting contribution of the twentieth century to the history of the Church.

Our task now is to outline briefly this new form of the call to Church unity. Its sources are multiple, some historical, some theological, and some Biblical. We shall be primarily concerned only with the last two.

HISTORICAL REAWAKENING

Certainly the historical source most relevant to our interest has been the reawakened sense of the contrast between Christianity and culture, but also of the Christian's involvement in culture in our own time. Because they have experienced violently the demonic possibilities of culture, men have felt the necessity for a Word, a Presence and a Community that are not merely cultural words, cultural encounters, and cultural communities. From this sense of discontinuity has developed the search for a God-given Word, Presence and Spirit (or *koinonia*). And out of this search has come the rediscovery of the Community wherein that Word, Presence, and Spirit are known and experienced; namely, the

Church. This rediscovery has been made in Biblical studies and theology alike, and has been made in one way or another by almost every serious Christian individual and communion within the whole Church. No person or group has escaped this renewed interest, not even among those free churches where the conception of the Church had been buried for so long. The revival of concern for the meaning of the Church, the renewed interest in liturgy and the sacraments, the many studies of the ministry and its functions, and the universal revival of interest in theology, and especially in the historic traditions of Christian theology—all these new concerns of professionals and laymen alike point to the rediscovery of the centrality of the Church—as being in the world. Nothing indicates so clearly the departure of contemporary religion and theology from the individualistic nineteenth century, which in both its conservative and liberal forms saw little value in Christian community, as this new emphasis on the Church.

THE CHURCH AS GIVEN

Because of its search for a God-given community beyond the distortions of the communities of culture, the new sense of the Church has as perhaps its most important characteristic the belief that the Church is not a humanly contrived institution but a God-given, God-ordained one. Both Biblically and theologically, it has been affirmed repeatedly that the Church is not founded by men, even by regenerated men, but by the saving activity of God. The Church is, therefore, not so much the human, institutional result of the gospel, as liberal free churchmen have often thought, as it is a part of it; it is not so much a *consequence* of the Spirit's work among men as conservative free churchmen thought, as it is an instrument through which God does His work, and so an essential part of that work. Nothing is so often repudiated among contemporary American Baptists and Disciples, as among Catholics, as the idea that men are first converted as individuals, and then come together to form the church—as if the gregarious instincts of men were its sole cause. On the contrary we hold that God works in and through a *community* of believers, and that a person comes into relationship with God only because of the witness, faith, and life of the community, and only within the fellowship and worship of the community. This has been a historic emphasis of Disciples: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. We are Christians within the Body of Christ, which is of God as the gospel is of God, not individual Christians which then form the body of believers.

This emphasis on the God-given character of the Church is of great importance for its unity. If we men had formed the Church (having been already saved by a gospel unrelated to it), then we might be in a position to determine its membership (with regard to race, class, etc.), and its form. We could, in fact, freely choose whether to remain in separation from others or not; since the Church had been formed by us, its unity would be a matter of our own decision. We could then ask, "How much will we lose or gain by joining with others?" Because the Church was a human creation, its unity would be a human option.

Surely the most basic fact about the Church, however, is that it is of God, that its foundation is an act of God, and not of men. It is, therefore, God's church, not ours; its Lord is Jesus Christ, not the men who contracted a new society. As we shall see, the divine dimension in the Church, when analyzed, shows that unity is inherent in the Church; that is to say, whenever the Church appears in fulness, it is a unity. If, then, the Church is divided, in just so far it is not fully the Church. Thus, the unity of the church is not an option, a matter of temperament or of enhanced concern, as one might say the concern for international unity is an ethical concern, enlarging the normal concern for one's own nation. No, to be concerned for the *reality* of our own local church is to be involved inherently in the concern for the *unity* of the whole Church—for any church that is separated from others is in so much not the real church. We do not *have* churches, which can then decide or not decide to find unity. We will fully become God's church only when we are one, one in some sense much more than at present. For the unity of the Church is a part of its initial nature, so now it is not itself when divided. And that unity is given to it by its Founder and Lord; it is, therefore, an essential obligation of each Christian to manifest that unity in every way possible.

UNITY AS GIVEN

We have said that the unity of the church stems from its foundation by God's act; let us now proceed to give some content to this assertion. Why is it that the Church of Jesus Christ has "given" unity which each Christian is called to manifest?

1. I suppose most of us would agree with the definition of the Church, or "ecclesia," as a community of people called out to its Lord. It is not a community bound together by blood, by geo-

raphy, or by a similar culture. It is a community formed and knit by its loyalty to the Lord who has fashioned it and called each member into it. The Church, then, on its most fundamental level exists as a people with one Lord, Jesus Christ. In so far as He is Lord of this people—in so far as His Word is heard here, His Presence known, and His Will done—then this community is the Church. Or, as this point is put in other language, the Church is the Body of Christ in which the Spirit of Christ dwells; in so far as His Spirit animates this body, it is the Church. Because of this basic theological conception of the Church as the “one People of God,” I dare to capitalize the word, and to speak of “the Church.”

Now, if this is so, the unity of the Church—as Roman Catholics rightly remind us—follows inescapably. For such a community cannot be divided against itself. If it truly has one Lord, and follows one Will, then the spiritual center of each part of the body is one—and division is impossible. For this most basic reason, therefore, a divided church, a church in conflict—not, let us note, simply with variety—is in so far not the true church. For the division and conflict come from divergent loyalties, and from divergent wills. It is in this sense that we may speak of the divisions of the church as the result of sin: not that the “dividers” are sinners more than the “uniters,” but that the general fact of divergence and conflict on both sides indicates a plurality of Lords.

As recent thought on the nature of sin makes clear, a plurality of Lords is the essence of sin. Sin is the worship of my own self or group as God, the raising of what is partial to the ultimate position of unconditional devotion which only God deserves. If it is the true God who fills this position of Lord in my life, then no man is my enemy since, as the universal Creator, God is the Lord of all, including every neighbor of mine. If, however, it is my own group or tradition that is my Lord, the center of all meaning and security in my life, and the standard by which I judge all right and wrong, then this is a partial or limited Lordship. Those outside its scope, whose security and standards are derived elsewhere, inevitably come into conflict with my life devoted to a center different from their own. Two national groups, each ultimately devoted to the security, strength and prestige of their own state, can scarcely avoid conflict; every action which enhances the power of the one lord, threatens the security of the other. Unless these two groups can find a common object of ultimate devotion, they

are doomed to conflict. Division and conflicts among men, therefore, indicate immediately that the groups in question are worshippers of different gods, the gods of their own group or tradition.

In this sense, as Niebuhr points out, religious wars are the quintessence of sin. Here men, because they are religious, know of the ultimate dimension of existence, and, therefore, in their worship of their own religious group, raise what is partial closer to the throne of God than does the mere secular idolator. For this reason, rivalries among religious groups are more cruel, more fanatical, and more intolerant than are secular rivalries. Viewed in this light, the history of a divided and warring Church, (warring in our day in only the polite, spiritual sense of competition, mutual distaste, and noncooperation) is the center and primary evidence of the history of sin (as our Disciples tradition rightly maintained. What those Disciples were perhaps not so conscious of was that the essence of that sin was to make one's own view of the true Church absolutely normative for all). The Lordship of Christ in His Church means the surrender of the lordship of all that is partial and relative in the churches—and so that Lordship both requires and makes possible union with those who worship and serve Him differently than do we.

2. The essential unity of the Church is made even more clear when the nature of the will of God for His people becomes clarified. One might possibly say that the main theme of the Bible is the gradual formation of the People of God, and the gradual unfolding of God's Person and will for that People. In one sense, the great message of the Bible is the formation of the Church and the commission given to it to become God's people in truth. The re-discovery of this theme in the Scriptures is the great contribution of recent Biblical scholarship to the renewed interest in the Church and its unity.

This is an enthralling story: of God's calling and formation of His people through Abraham and Moses; of the continual breaking of the covenant, and the prophetic attempt to bring the rebellious people back to its terms—and finally of the reconstitution of this people in a new form through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, despite much Disciples' Marcionite tendencies, the early church *did* call itself the New Israel, the heirs to the promises, the continuation as well as the reconstitution of the one People of God; and the Church can only be understood in terms of the entire sweep of the Biblical story. In a real sense

one could say that the purpose of the mighty acts of salvation, of which the whole Bible speaks, is the formation of this people who will hear God's word, who will know His presence in their midst, and who will do His will.

Now as this story of the formation of the People develops, the character of God's will for this people unfolds. The notion of what God requires of his covenant people becomes clarified: gradually the emphasis on the ceremonies and rites of the religious life recedes, and the call to moral obedience comes forward. The character of the people whom God is fashioning is, according to the prophets, a community bound by justice and mercy, in which the poor are not oppressed, and where every man can have an equal place. Clearly God's purpose in forming His people is to create a new kind of community morally, with new kinds of relations one to another. As we all know, the understanding of this people of God, the "new humanity" as the Letter to Diognetus puts it, is deepened even more in the New Testament. There not the law of the old covenant, but love is the requirement of God's will and the characteristic sign of the New Israel: "ye shall be known as my disciples by the fact that ye love one another." Where other human communities, therefore, are characterized by discord, violence, and barriers of one sort or another, this one, in so far as it reflects its Lord, is a community of love and brotherhood. One central purpose of the gospel, of God's act of salvation, is, therefore, the establishment of a new community of love, held together by the love of God and of each other—tolerant of differences in its midst, and of weaknesses among its members, but one in love. "That ye may be one, as I and the Father are one." In the sense, then, that the Bible tells us of God's will for His people, it tells us unmistakably that a divided, warring church is *not* the new community of God, but something less than that, because it is in that conflict no longer obedient to its Lord.

When we think of the great Church primarily as an institution or organization, and thus of the local churches as the only centers of "fellowship" and of love, as Disciples are apt to do, then we are prone to miss the tremendous ethical obligation to unity that is inherent in the Christian message. Then the obligation to love and harmony among the brethren is confined to personal relations within a congregation, and the rest is merely organizational and institutional arrangements—in which we have professed disbelief anyway. If, however, we realize that the Church as a whole

is the object and result of divine activity, in a real sense the purpose of salvation, and that this *ecclesia* is a People formed by God to live together in love and harmony, then the picture of a warring, divided church is an offense to every aspect of the Christian Gospel. For this reason those who say that "to come together may be to lose the Gospel," have missed the main point of that Gospel—whether they identify the "gospel" they feel they may lose with the perfection of a confessional theology, or the exact restoration of the primitive church. The Gospel is in large part the divine promise of the creation of a new humanity bound together by love and not by conflict. Thus, to stay apart (with our own "Paul" or "Apollos") is in truth to lose the Gospel, whereas to come together in Christ is to find the Church again. For as the New Testament makes very clear, when we really are in Christ, we love and respect one another. Strangely enough, on this point Augustine is the great theologian of the ecumenical movement. More than any of the other great interpreters of the Church, he saw that the first and most positive result of genuine Christian faith is love among the brethren, so that the truest "mark" of membership in the real Church is that a man have charity for his brother—"even though we differ, let us abide together, for charity is of God, and is the true sign of His Church."

3. As a people with a Lord whose will (and gift?) for them is love, then the Church is a community, one of whose prime functions is to break down the barriers between men that lead to conflict. Its purpose and its call is, therefore, not only to evangelize, but also to be a reconciling force in the world, to show forth the love of God to the world: to be itself a sacrament, a visible sign of the invisible grace of the divine love. As the New Testament makes very plain, this divine love is one which leaps over the barriers which men have created. In the Incarnation and Atonement, it has originally overcome the greatest barrier of all, that of sin which we raised against God. And as Jesus made clear, *agape* overtops all the false walls that separate men from one another: "If ye love those who love you, what thanks have ye—for sinners also love those that love them." Within the natural communities of mankind, sin continually works upon the created and good differences of men, differences in race, sex, culture and nation, to create out of them fear and hatred, conflict and oppression. Christian love, on the contrary, seeks to undo this work of sin; to unite the differences of men into a community, still with its created and

historical differences, but made harmonious by love rather than discordant by hate and fear. Thus, the whole Church, while not a body of uniform character, is even less an aggregate of conflicting groups. Its diversity is held together by love; it is a body with many members made one by the indwelling spirit of Christ.

The essence, therefore, of the love that characterizes the Christian community is that it is a reconciling love, eradicating the barriers between men that sin has created out of our natural differences, and doing so by its own means of forgiveness, tolerance, and fellowship with "every neighbor." For "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female."

This means in turn two things about the Church whenever it becomes itself. First of all, that the barriers between men which the surrounding community has raised, and which it is the task of the Church to reconcile, cannot come into the life of the Church to divide it without the most serious loss to the Church. Thus, whenever class, national, ideological or racial barriers are found within the fellowship of the churches, there we may be sure the New Testament Church has been left far, far behind—and any claim to "restoration" is ludicrous. And secondly, it means that when the churches erect barriers of their own, drawn not from the natural community around them but from their own historical life, it even more denies itself. One of the great tragedies of history is that a People commissioned to bring healing and reconciliation to a divided world, should have brought to that world instead new barriers and so new causes for conflict and division. The Church can neither be itself nor do its task in its state of division and conflict. How can it be a community of reconciling love, when it reproduces in its life the barriers of its world, and brings to that world barriers it itself has made? To fear Christian fellowship with other Christians, both of other races and of other denominations, because we may "lose members" or perhaps relinquish a building and a tradition is to fear the wrong loss. To fail Christian fellowship involves the much more serious danger of losing our Lord. The Church is not ours, but His, and reconciliation *is* His will for us.

4. Finally, it is surely plain that none of our communions possesses Christ fully. No one group can claim to embody the whole Church; each one is a partial, although possibly invaluable, representation of the wholeness of the Church as it has appeared in history and spreads around the world. Each has a precious portion of this wholeness—and to that which we have inherited

we must each witness so that it will not be lost to the Church at large. But since each of us also lacks something precious, we can learn from each other. It is a far healthier attitude to look on other groups as witnessing to truths and emphases we may have lost or forgotten, than it is continually to be regarding the small treasure that we hold in our own hands—as if it would by itself save anyone. Thus, free churchmen are inclined, when asked what they “stand for,” to reply only in terms of their own “distinctives” of autonomy, immersion and the rejection of creeds. In this they are apt to forget God and love. By staring only at the small jewel in their hands, they may lose the greater treasure of the Gospel, held in part by the emphases of other groups.

THE CLIMATE OF GIVENESS

The Church, as we have seen, is a community that hears the Word of God to its life, that knows His presence in worship, and that seeks to be obedient to His will. These three essential elements of the Church require different concrete talents and efforts on the part of the Church. Its relation to the Word of God sets to churchmen the unending tasks of Biblical study, of theology, and of preaching. The need for worship, for a living knowledge of the Presence of God in the community, means that the problems of liturgy, and of the vitality of the sacraments of the Church, are inescapable for us all—whether we be “high” or “low,” Catholic or Free. And the covenant to be obedient to the will of God means a continuing moral seriousness, and a patient and ever-recurrent study in the light of the Gospel of the ethical problems that face the community. And in each of these elements, the Church is seeking to unite the living *authority* of the Lord with the *free* response of men in order to create a new existence for us all and to sing the glory of God in each life. Inevitably, with all these various tasks, and especially with this baffling complex of divine authority and human freedom, some groups will produce some emphases and answers, and other groups others. Some will be strong in the area of Biblical study, theology and preaching—and be able to teach us much about the Word of God in the Church. Others will preserve and foster a deep sense of worship and of the healing of the divine Presence therein; and still others will bring an important witness to the seriousness of the Christian calling to the moral life. No one church in history has given a satisfying answer on all these issues; each can learn greatly from the others in those

areas within which its own emphases have weakened it. Above all, some groups will have a fine sense of the divine authority within the Church, and be able thereby to protect their life against the idolatrous authorities of culture—meanwhile needing help from their brothers in the protection of the freedom of their own members. From these groups, the Free Churches, subject as they are to the “authorities” of the customs and beliefs of their local communities, have much indeed to learn. But, on the other hand, the Free Churches, with their emphasis on the individual belief and free assent of each man, can teach much to the others about the vitality and the transforming quality of a freely affirmed faith. The result is that none of us is sufficient alone, for none of us has the whole richness of the Body of Christ. We can be “whole” only when we can be together and learn from one another—but above all we are then “whole” because by being together we shall each of us be more nearly the Church.

It should be plain from these last remarks, that the true Church of our Lord, while one in spirit and in witness and in function, is not a uniform body. If it ever became so, then it would unite on the basis of some one view of the Church, and so re-duplicate in itself the poverty of each single denomination today. It can become and it can communicate the richness of the whole body, only if it embodies the variety of answers and emphases which our created differences, and our finite perspectives inevitably produce in history. But it is just the nature of the divine love to harmonize this sort of variety, and it is just this sort of unity, of one body with many members, that is the earliest picture of the Church. If, then, we would restore the Biblical church, let us not set our sights on the letter of the scriptural law, but on its spirit: and work for a community bound together in all its diversity by the spirit of love. In this alone shall we manifest our one Lord, and in this alone shall we begin to embody and to do His will for his people.

II

PROBLEMS OF RESTORATION AND UNITY

In the second portion of this paper, I would like, as a newcomer to the Brotherhood, to make some comments on the particular problems which this communion faces within the present ecumenical concern of the Church as a whole. As we have remarked, the unity of the Church has been a unique aim of the Dis-

ciples since their foundation. However, anyone who studies this movement in our own day realizes that great changes have taken place in our thought, and that consequently the terms within which that unity was then understood are no longer either credible or useful to us today. These terms must, therefore, be rethought. These remarks are not so much a part of that rethinking, as they are a halting effort to make plain what these changes are and so why this rethinking must take place.

Certainly the element of early Disciples' thought that strikes its students as both prominent and yet alien to our own minds, is its rootage in the Enlightenment. Almost every major theological and ecclesiological conception of its early leaders reflects this Enlightenment influence. In so far, therefore, as we no longer think in the rationalistic and a-historical terms of the Enlightenment, we are led to question the forms of early Disciples' thinking. Prominent among these changes of thought are two especially: (1) we have serious doubts that there is and can be such a thing in human life and history as an eternal, unchangeable truth, a truth that participates in no way in the relativity and development inherent in all historical reality. (2) There is a doubt in our minds that any human community can so remove itself from the developments and processes of history as successfully or meaningfully to "restore" the exact counterpart of a past community. Both of these doubts reflect the movement from the "unhistorical" climate of the Enlightenment to the historically-conscious climate of our own day. The Enlightenment was strangely blind (although this had many healthy results in the area of reforms) to the reality and the influence of history, on ideas and communities alike. But this is fatal to an understanding of the Church, because if anything characterizes the Church, it is history. The Church above all is the community which through history preserves, preaches, witnesses and lives the Gospel; its essence, its function, and its reality are historical. And the problem of its unity can, therefore, only be understood clearly when its relation to its own embeddedness within history is understood. This is the most basic reason that the early Disciples' theories of unity must be rethought.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND DISCIPLES' HERITAGE

If, with some trepidation, I were to risk a summary of the early Disciples' understanding of unity, I would put it in terms of two general ideas inherited largely from the Enlightenment.

1. First, it was generally assumed that there was in the Bible a simple gospel which is both quite clear to the reason of any man and quite complete with regard to every relevant religious or ecclesiastical question. This "gospel" is in every sense of the words an eternal truth, a coherent system of self-evident (clear and distinct) ideas so dear to the minds of Enlightenment men. Its present form as seen in the Scriptures has accordingly undergone no historical development, and so it reflects no historical partiality or trends (such as are reflected in saying there is a "Pauline," "Johannine," "Greek" or "first century" tradition in the New Testament). Thus, in its present form within the words of the Bible, the gospel comes into history uninfluenced by the currents and so the relativities of history; like a mathematical idea, it is outside of time. Furthermore, this eternal gospel is received by later Christians outside rather than within the historical process. For the mind of man, so said the Enlightenment, can easily, accurately, and with no historical influencing, grasp and believe what is clearly True, if the evidence warrants it. Thus in the human reception of this Truth, there is no need of interpretation. Since it contains no facet of mystery (an outrageous idea to the Enlightenment), no theological effort is needed to decide what *is* this gospel's message, to clarify it for the untrained, to "make it relevant to our time," etc. And, when the message is understood, there is no cultural or denominational partiality or historical relativity in that understanding. When we grasp this gospel, we do not do so as American, 19th century, frontier Disciples—influenced by the thought-forms of the Enlightenment. Rather, our minds are transcendent to these historical "accidents," and make direct and clear contact with a transhistorical Truth. The simple gospel is transhistorical in origin, and received as well outside of the movement and conditioning of history. All of this is assumed in almost everything that is said about the gospel by the early leaders of our movement.

It is in these terms that we can best understand the negative attitude of these leaders to the "orders" (ministry) and "confessions" (theology) which church history had produced.

If one could in the most general way say what in Church history the clergy and the theology of the Church "did" it would be that these two aspects of the church's life helped, and sometimes hindered, to preserve the faith over the passage of years and in different cultural contexts. For as we know, changes in the faith

can occur with time, and different culture can transform its content—with the result that something is necessary to help preserve it as it moves into new environments. Both clergy and theological formulation have, in this effort of preservation, been themselves raised “outside of history” (as was the Biblical picture by the Disciples) in terms of dogmas and infallible clerics. Nevertheless, their value and function in the church has been largely the essential ones of preservation, of interpretation, and of providing within the church some form of recognized authority essential to that task.

Assuming that the Church is an historical entity which may, as new ideas appear and new customs arise, lose its Christian message and its Christian patterns of life and worship, we may assert that *some* structural form in thought and life, and *some* system of recognized authority is indispensable. The problem of the “bones” of the Church, that skeleton of understood belief and of legitimate authority which bears this body through historical time and through a variety of cultures, is raised inevitably by the historical character of the Church, by its embeddedness in time and culture. And unless we see and understand this historical aspect of the Church, as the Enlightenment did not, we can never understand the function, value, and proper control of the Church’s inevitable theology and leadership.

However, if it is believed that the Church possesses an eternal and unchangeable Truth, complete in all details both with regard to belief, to polity, and to behavior; and if it is believed that that Truth can be easily and clearly grasped by any man without interpretation or tradition—then this problem of history is resolved. This eternal and unchanging “gospel” is *there* to be read and believed so long as the Bible is there. Thus, no ministry or trained body of students, no theological interpretation, no traditional “symbol,” or statement of its contents, is necessary to preserve that gospel within history and culture. For this central reason, as well as their valid disgust at the troubles that orders and theology had caused, the early Disciples leaders were able to regard the orders and confessions of the Church’s life as “mere human additions,” and as essentially dispensable elements in the life of the Church. The unique treasure of the Church was enshrined in the “simple gospel,” and nothing else, except free believers, was needed for the Church always to exist in any situation.

2. The second general idea was that within that simple and eternal gospel there was enshrined a "pattern" for the Church which was, like the gospel that bore it, unhistorical and eternal. This pattern, seen there more clearly by those leaders than it can be by us today, was no construct of a historically conditioned and so relative interpretation. Man, in finding this pattern, contributes nothing in the way of temporal or cultural ideas to it. It is absolutely "given" from the other side. Thus, it is not *one* among the historical interpretations which the denominations have made of the same scriptures; it is not a partial "denominational" picture of the Church. It is an eternal idea unrelated to history because inserted into history by God. Hence, the community which follows this pattern is not itself a "denomination," a construct of history, a "human addition." If it follows this pattern, this community leaps out of history and makes contact directly with the eternal pattern in the gospel.

It is on the basis of this theory of an eternal pattern unhistorically discovered and followed that the call to unity was offered. For, as we have seen, to follow this pattern is not to join with or to favor one among the many denominations of history. It is rather to achieve the original and perfect unity of the Church before history produced these divisions. Thus, the problem of the divisions which history elaborates is resolved essentially by moving out of history: we can unite beyond the disunities of history by leaving the plane of historical relativity entirely through making direct contact with the unrelative unity at the beginning. This view of an "original" and "natural" community lying at the foundation of all historical states, whose differences are therefore merely nonessential historical elaborations, is common to a great deal of Enlightenment social theory. We should recognize that it is on this basis that the twin goals of restoration and unity could be and were preached together. To restore the eternal gospel pattern is to unify the Church, because that very restoration transcends the divisions within the Church which history and time produce. It was the unhistorical consciousness of the Enlightenment as much as anything else which brought unity and restoration together.

RECENT RE-ORIENTATION

To contemplate these elements of the early view is already to realize how much change has taken place in our thought, and espe-

cially in our understanding of the relation of human life, both secular and religious, to history. These changes are, moreover, fairly fundamental; they strike at the very roots of each of these basic beliefs of the early leaders. Thus, these changes make immense difficulties, both theoretical and practical, whenever Disciples consider the problem of unity. They probably explain in part why we, who are the group most persistently loyal to the ecumenical ideal, have done almost the least in its theoretical elaboration. Let us indicate the effects of these changes in turn.

1. To men of our time the gospel, as it is enshrined in the words of Scripture, is neither simple nor is it transparently clear. While all of us firmly believe that it does witness to an Event whose origin is in Eternity, and in this sense is rightly called the Eternal Gospel, nevertheless, we know that its form, both as it is written and as it is received, does participate in history. Through its written form there move a variety of ideas with multiple historical origins; in each of its Biblical expressions appear different emphases, often in preliminary conflict with one another. They witness to one event and so bear one ultimate message, but every expression of it is historically conditioned (for example, the entire problem of "demythology"). We would not, therefore, agree that there is a single message of Scripture which is unambiguously and transparently clear to the mind of any man. Correspondingly, we would hesitate to claim that there was one single and simply discoverable pattern for the Church therein. For this reason all of us would agree that some interpretation of the Scripture was both necessary and unavoidable, an interpretation which will be more accurate (closer to the Gospel itself), the more training in history the interpreter has, the history both of the period of the gospels, and of the ideas which form the interpreters mind. Furthermore, we recognize that this unavoidable interpretation will itself participate in historical conditioning, that is, will be the work of a man influenced by his training, his period, his church, his general ideas. The Gospel is both written and received within history, and so can be known and preserved only through the kind of study and effort of which theology, both Biblical and systematic, is the "professional" exercise, and of which confessions and even creeds have historically been the distillations. No one, therefore, can understand what it is the Bible says "when it speaks" except through the interpretative forms of his own past and of his own time. For the Gospel comes to us from history in the past, and

within history in our own present. This historical conditioning of every view of the Gospel has always been the case—as we quickly realize when we look back from the 20th century at the “gospel” of our early leaders and find so much of the Enlightenment there.

This understanding of the relation of history both to the formation and to the reception of the “gospel” makes radical changes in the first basic conception of our leaders. Now we see that a part of the necessary and continually renewed function of the Church, if it is to retain that Gospel at all, is to interpret, to theologize, to make “confessions,” to create “symbols”—although we would all repudiate the creation of authoritative, changeless dogmas. We would never want these theological formulations to define who is a Christian, but the effort continually to understand and define what the community believes, i.e., what the Gospel is, is essential to the ongoing life of the Church. In so far as the interpretative task is the sole means of receiving and of preaching the Gospel, we agree that the historical development of theology, and the historical efforts of the Christian community to express and refashion its faith, to express it anew in a new historical setting, is indispensable. This, in turn, means that we cannot achieve contact with the Gospel merely by restoring something beyond all this historical effort, and by repudiating all that history has done to understand its faith. For our “gospel,” whether we recognize it or not, is an historical interpretation developed within the Christian tradition, and so if we shun the theological task, we shall only have an unexamined and uncritical interpretation.

The fact that the Gospel is neither simple nor unchanging in any form appropriable by man also teaches us that the development of theological confessions and of “orders” of recognized authority in the community may have been a way of preserving as well as of diluting the faith. The theological confessions are in truth “human additions,” but they are necessary since any appropriation of the Gospel is inevitably another example of the same human attempt to understand the message communicated to us in Bible and in Christian witness. Without the explicit effort to formulate, understand and validly reinterpret the faith, moreover, the Gospel might be lost since any community in history is prey to changing ideas, and must continually see that its preaching and its thought are in fact a sound interpretation of the original Gospel. This is a tricky task, and it must be done in freedom—but it can-

not be avoided by cliches which merely cloud the issue—such as “we have no creed or theology, but only the Bible.” For the Bible merely presents us with the theological problem; it does not resolve it. Although they involve the risk of distortion and the risk of authoritarianism, therefore, both theological formulation and “orders” are ways by which the message is preserved; for the historical community of the Church must understand its faith in order to preach and teach it, and that effort involves training and some sort of recognition of authority in this intellectual enterprise. The discovery of the historical character of the Gospel leads us to a new understanding of the Church as inevitably containing both doctrinal formulations and “experts,” as our own recent efforts to study a “Disciples’ Theology” show.

When this is seen, as it is by many Free Churchmen today, we discover that we are not so very different from other traditions. Our own “simple gospel,” discovered and promulgated by our leaders, turns out to be very much like a confessional pronouncement of the “orders” of other groups. And what this simple formula was to “do,” namely to preserve the Church’s integrity through historic time, we now see is done in those other traditions by their theological confessions and by their authoritative orders. It becomes clear, therefore, that the adherence of these groups to their own confessional theologies and to the status of their own orders is not mere bigotry, but very much the same sort of serious loyalty to the faith as they understand it, as was our own original adherence to “the simple gospel.” In all of this none of us is completely right, and we all need one another. The Church, as a community in history, always needs the Gospel enshrined in the original documents as its point of reference. But it also needs trained, and in some sense authorized interpreters of those documents, and especially it needs to embark in each generation on the laborious task of understanding them and interpreting them. Thus, unity is not achieved “over” denominational confessions and outside of history, as much as it is through a clearer view of what these variations have stood for, an appreciation of that variety, and a determination in the Spirit to find a harmony within them.

Some liberal Disciples, while agreeing that the older view was in error, have come to the same general conclusion about “confessions” and “orders” on another ground. To them the Christian message is more or less identical with culture at its intellectual and moral best. It has the “moral authority” of obvious truth to

any right-minded man, so no system of authority in the church is necessary; and because its message will be accepted by all men of good will, it needs to embark on no serious effort to define or state its truth so as to preserve it. Thus, to them an emphasis on the content of faith is theological hair-splitting; the historic discussions of "heresy" were purely demonic; and above all, to raise theological barriers to church unity is a totally nonsensical endeavor. Because they feel so certain that culture will preserve the essentials of the faith they cherish (a valid feeling since the contents of that faith as they conceived it were largely cultural), they see no need for the church to guard its faith either by theological formulation or ministerial authority. Thus they advocate church union on the basis of theological liberty alone; "we can get together if only we will pay no attention to these theological issues." No more than did their Disciple forefathers, do they understand the function and importance of theological formulation and of authority within the Church. The difference is that the vehicle that "bears" the essential gospel throughout history is in this case not the scriptural word, but the benevolent mind and heart of Western culture.

However, as we now feel, the Gospel and the heart of culture are by no means necessarily the same; they may veer apart as radically as in the pagan world that surrounded the early church. If in that case the separation of the message from the world is not maintained by a "simple gospel," but achieved by the community's continuing reinterpretation of that gospel, then this community will need some trained authority and some standards of belief. It will need some ideological center and some human center from which to say "no" to ideas that are antithetical to the faith—as the Confessional Church had to say "no" to Hitler's German Christianity. The change in our understanding of our own relation to the simple gospel means that we must rethink the function in our own life of confessional theology, of symbols and of creeds—else our creeds be either unexamined dogmas as in fundamentalism, or cultural viewpoints as in extreme modernism. And it means that Free Churches should not insist on reunion "without confessions," i.e., on the basis of theological liberty alone—as if those who saw the importance of theological positions were merely bigots. Complete theological liberty and indifference in any religious community would lay that group open to all the cultural winds that blow. Thus, those communions which raise doctrinal questions

should earn our gratitude. For union can come only if we work within and seriously examine these confessional theologies—including our own. They are essential to the Church; to lose them in the name of union would be at least as serious as losing our freedom for the same cause.

2. The second, and even more important, dislocation that this change in our ideas has caused concerns the identity of the twin goals of restoration and unity. For with this new view of the relation of the Church to history, restoration is suddenly seen to conflict with unity. First of all, the simple pattern found in "the gospel" is now seen, by all of us, not to be an unchanging, nondenominational, divine construct—but rather a very human interpretation, historical, partial and denominational. Thus, to insist that each group return to this pattern is not to call them "out of" all historical denominations, but to try to convert them to one. Our own participation in the relativity of history means that we can no longer in good grace claim our pattern to be that of the united Church. We realize now that unity is to be sought *through* the denominational variety of history, not outside it; and thus that in that unity *our* pattern has no more essential place than do any of the others. This is a radical change in Disciples thought, but, although its full implications may not have become explicit, most have made it.

The concrete result is that the basic elements of the restored church of the early Disciples, immersion and autonomy, have in the latter day become barriers to unity, rather than its means. All of us have had an uneasy feeling that these things on which we insist were more like the "creeds" and "orders" of our brother Christians than we like to think; that is, denominational characteristics taken by those who hold them to be necessary for the being and the preservation of the true Church. Only we could avoid facing this unpleasant recognition of our own "denominationalism" because we thought we could identify the early church of which they were symbols with the united Church. So, we said to ourselves, by insisting on them we are forwarding unity, not blocking it—as was the Anglican who would not take communion with us. This is, however, to fool ourselves—unless we are willing to return whole hog to a historical Enlightenment thought. For in actuality there is little difference with regard to church unity between the Anglican who will not attend communion with the Disciples, and the Disciple who insists on the immersion of his Angli-

can wife when she joins his fellowship. Both are, in their acts, denying the validity of the ministry and the ordinances of the other communion—and if the one should be scolded for his lack of ecumenical feeling, so should the other. If a Disciple communion service without apostolic succession should be valid for the Anglican, as I believe it should, then an Anglican baptism without immersion should be valid for the Disciple. Both are interpretations of what the gospel, as we have it in the Scriptures, implies; neither one of us has made direct and unequivocal contact with the Eternal Gospel. This is not to say that our witness to adult baptism is unimportant or invalid—it is rather to ask if we can with intellectual honesty maintain it as rigorously as we do, and still proclaim our devotion to the cause of unity. Considering our own relativity, and the awesome command of our Lord to love and cherish one another, it seems clear in which direction we should move with regard to our own aims and ideals.

In the present, therefore, we can no longer have the luxury of affirming both “restoration,” as Disciples have interpreted it, and “unity” with equal fervor. As we have seen, we no longer believe all that the identity of these two goals once implied, and if we still try to hold them closely together, we shall end with neither one. For we cannot restore the early church in outward form because history cannot be turned back, and we cannot unite the Church by that restoration without the inconceivable “conversion” of all to our point of view. We can, therefore, only restore that early church *in spirit*, and that cannot be done at all if the legal understanding of restoration prevents our union with our brethren. Thus, we are forced to a basic choice of ultimate loyalty. And in this decision surely the Gospel we cherish gives us ample guidance, as the first part of this paper tried to show. For there certainly it is the spirit of love, rather than the letter of the law, that is the main point. If, moreover, we can relax our restoration fervor in the name of love, we may be surprised, as all Christians are, that “all these things are added unto us.” For to our amazement we shall find that, because we had sought love rather than law, we had in fact come closer than ever before to the restoration of Christ’s true Church.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the marks of the Church necessary for the Church to *be* the Church? What must be done for these "marks" to be discernible to the world as it regards our present churches?
2. If unity is inherent in the Church as God-given, what is man's role in the "giving" and receiving of this Church? Does the Church cease to exist when churches are divided? Does it necessarily exist when they are united?
3. Current emphasis on the Church in the world suggests that the *distinctive* qualities of different churches may have their validity more in the relation of church to world in differing times, cultures, situations than in the relation of church to church. What do we understand to be our relation to, and responsibility in this world now?
4. As regards each group's "distinctive witness" to the whole Church, is it possible that some distinctive emphases have a particular relevance in one historic situation, effect their correcting function, and are absorbed into larger history? If distinctive contributions are seasonal or provincial, what are the alternatives of the group or "party" when their case has been made? What are the responsibilities that go with remaining an "association"? with becoming a "church"? with "sinking into the Body of Christ at large"?
5. If God gives a unity which is intended to be total, in what sense can we be satisfied with, or participate in lesser unities?
6. If the whole Church is to be one by comprehension of differences, must it include contradiction? Are all equally valid? What are the criteria to which such questions must be referred?
7. Brunner suggests that the Church of one period and place is not essentially imitable (or that the imitation is not the Church). Is it restorable? What is restorable?
8. What are the relative demands for oneness of body *and* oneness of faith in a united church?
9. What are some "next steps" in making councils of churches actually expressive of Christian unity? Does the average denominational leader and layman see such councils as competitors with their churches, or welcome them as instruments by which they may fulfill the mission of their churches?
10. Does the conciliar movement (city, state, national and world councils of churches) constitute the ultimate hope for Christian unity? Or is it possible for us practically to envisage something more nearly in keeping with the ideal of One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church?

THE DISCIPLES' HOPE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

By WALTER W. SIKES

“‘UNION IN TRUTH’ is our motto,” wrote Thomas Campbell in 1809 in the now famous *Declaration and Address*, in many ways the most significant fountainhead of the tradition of the Disciples of Christ. He observed further, “To advocate the cause of unity while espousing a party would appear . . . absurd.” The genius of the Disciples is suggested by these two pregnant statements. In the first place, this tradition has been informed by the intention of seeking the unity of all Christians—not unity in any possible event and on any conceivable ground, but “union in truth.” And in the second place, it has been shaped by the presupposition that to be or to sanction being “a party” (we may read “a denomination”) would make such an advocacy of union ridiculous.

DISCIPLES' SELF-IMAGE

Three features accordingly have provided the main outlines of the self-image of Disciples for a hundred and fifty years. The first feature has been the view that their primary motivation was to seek the reunion of all Christians. A second has been that they had hit upon or were given a new and distinctively true insight into the necessary and possible ground for such unity. And a third has been that, despite the fact that the whole of Christendom was disrupted by division and that every other church body constituted a divisive “party,” they could and did exist and operate not as a “party” but as only the true—if not the pure—Church of God; they were at least nothing more divisive than a distinctive “movement within the Church and not a church along with other churches. Other churches were denominations or “sects” which by their very existence broke the unity of the whole church; but the existence of this “movement” or “brotherhood,” did not contribute to or participate in this sin of brokenness, since we were not a “sect.”

This image we have had of ourselves has been both our glory and our shame. It has been our glory when, as has frequently been the case, we have seen clearly the vision of a Church re-

united in Christ who is the Truth and have given ourselves in devotion to this vision. It has been our shame when, as has too often happened, we have supposed that we somehow were possessors of the truth with a purity of understanding and motive that no other Christians quite matched, and have become partisan advocates of our own understanding of the gospel of Christ and the nature and mission of the Church as the only basis on which unity could be recovered. But always we have been embarrassed by the fact that to the whole Christian world we have appeared to be just another "party" concerned with its own existence and welfare, seeking unity only on such terms as would not compromise these.

We may begin this brief inquiry into what contribution the distinctive tradition of Disciples has to make to Christian unity and the correlative questions of the kind of unity for which Disciples may hope on the grounds of this tradition by examining at greater length this self-image and its validity. What is our view of ourselves and how true to our genius is this self-image? Or to state our first problem somewhat differently, what is the ethos of our communion? Who are "the Disciples of Christ?" And just what has differentiated us from the other church bodies? This question concerning our distinctive character may seem a strange note on which to begin an essay on Christian unity. For it may be supposed that our being differentiated from the rest of the Church has been a ground of division, and perhaps even strife, rather than of union and peace. Concern with who we are, with "what Disciples believe," concern with our history and tradition, our ethos and character, is manifesting itself in many ways in recent years. Scores of books and hundreds of seminary and university theses, thousands of speeches, essays, conference papers and articles in journals testify to this widespread interest. In fact, we are just now entering a year of "Brotherhood-wide emphasis" in which this question is set right at the center. Any subject that requires that much paper and ink and breath is not to be adequately answered in a few paragraphs. But we must try to sketch briefly some relevant features of our genius as a people and our tradition.

First, this very phenomenon of self-examination is itself a principal clue as to who we are. We are a Protestant body which has not only become very self-conscious in recent decades, but which feels a great need to clarify, at least for ourselves, and perhaps for others, who "we" are and what "we" believe. It also re-

veals that our self-image is a rather blurred picture and that we would like very much to sharpen its lines, delineate its contours, and then identify ourselves with it more precisely.

OUR HISTORY ON OUR SELF-IMAGE

It is my conviction that this present confusion and self-concern are, in considerable part, due to a mistaken image, in some of its major features, that we have had of what we were in the past and hence of what we have to offer to the cause of unity. One of the most wholesome things going on among us, I believe, is that in this plethora of research, writing and discussion about who we are there is a great deal of revisionism. For we have had some illusions about our past. Let me quickly mention three, the understanding and correction of which would make us much more able to serve this cause of Christian unity. But I must add that in each of these illusions is a core of real and important truth, which we need to retain and re-assert in revised form.

The first of the illusions which we should re-examine is that Disciples have offered to a divided church the only obvious and acceptable platform for reunion; and that on the basis of that platform, or "plea," our fathers formed the vanguard of the movement for Christian unity. But we must re-examine both aspects of this view. Did the platform, or the guiding principles, offered by our early leaders constitute either a desirable or possible ground for Christian unity, then or now? And was the "Restoration Movement" an actual harbinger of the present ecumenical movement? That Disciples, no less than other communions and perhaps even more than some, have made positive and significant contributions to Christian unity is undeniable. "Christian unity is our business," as a recent self-study correctly affirms. But we should recognize that in the hundred and fifty years of our existence in place of uniting the divided churches we first added another "party" to the many already in existence, and then two by a process of schism and now are well advanced toward a second schism. Except on some mission fields where our churches have recently entered into union with sister communions, we have not been able to effect a union since the partially successful merger with the "Christian Church" in 1832. Now we are troubled by the tantalizing question, Why has this unity movement failed to achieve union, or even to maintain unity of itself?

Our fathers were certainly moved by a deep and genuine catholic impulse, and their sons have never forgotten this fact.

But the image that we have been in fact a unity movement must be corrected at two important points—the platform which was originally laid down as the ground of unity was one on which the realization of that end was quite impossible. In consequence of this initial error, the churches of Disciples were unable to participate in the more significant expressions of Christian unity of the last century, which were in fact the beginnings of the present ecumenical expressions of Christian unity. And only as we modify both that platform and our evaluation of its validity can we participate creatively in the present search for unity.

As to the first, the platform which the early leaders laid down had great merit, in two notable respects. They saw that “truth” was as essential as “union” and that acceptable union, or unity (and they often clearly distinguished between these two, holding that unity of the spirit must precede union of the body) must not be sought at the price of the purity of the Church. Moreover they saw that the requisite purity—or what they often called “truth”—required two, and in the final instance only two, affirmations: that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior and that the Scriptures are the ultimate appeal in matters of faith and practice of Christians. With respect to the second of these features, they laid down a remarkably irenic principle: “We are of the opinion that the Divine Word is equally binding upon all, so all lie under equal obligation to be bound by it, and it alone; and not by any human interpretation of it.” Thus they asserted what still appears to be the only hopeful ground of a united Church—the complete freedom of the Christian conscience under Christ as informed by the Scriptures.

But this catholic platform was immediately qualified in such a manner that there was not the slightest possibility of moving toward union on that basis. For the same document that laid down this catholic principle went on to define the nature of that truth in which union was to be effected in such a manner that it could never become the ground of Christian unity:

“Is it not as evident as the shining light that the scriptures exhibit but one and the self-same subject-matter, of profession and practice, at all times and in all places, and that, therefore, to say as it declares, and to do as it prescribes in all its holy precepts, its approved and inimitable examples would unite the Christian Church in a holy sameness of profession and practice?”

That biblical truth is not only completely definite but one and the same always, that it can be discerned in all essentials in complete unanimity and so must be obeyed alike by all was one of the fatal flaws in the platform on which our fathers pled their case. Thus the fundamental principles which they laid down upon which the re-uniting of the church was to be sought had in them the seeds of literalism and legalism which, when sprung to life, made disagreement on "essentials" inevitable and disunity certain. I. B. Grubbs, in the second generation of this movement, spoke for a vast number of its adherents when he declared, "Compliance with law is . . . an indispensable condition of acceptable religious service," (*Christian Standard*, IV, 1869, p. 335). But since the "law" to be obeyed was most ambiguous, they themselves could not agree on its requirements much less persuade others to their point of view.

This flaw was not removed, moreover, by the commendable efforts of our fathers to differentiate between "faith" on which they insisted there must be unity, and "opinion" on which they insisted with equal vigor that there must be allowed complete freedom. For in the end they always defined faith in intellectual terms. Faith was belief of credible testimony and opinion was any inference drawn by the mind from evidence. But to establish the credibility of testimony always requires a chain of inferences. On these premises it was quite impossible to draw a clear line between matters of faith on which unity was demanded and matters of opinion on which differences could be allowed. Consequently what was thought to be a unitive principle became actually divisive.

A similar but perhaps a somewhat more serious confusion resulted from their efforts to escape legalism and literalism by distinguishing between "essentials" on which conformity to the Scriptural instruction or example was required and "non-essentials" (or as Alexander Campbell preferred to call them, "incidentals") where freedom of judgment and action must be granted. The difficulty here lay rather in the major premise laid down than in their efforts to interpret that premise. This erroneous premise consisted of the double assertions (in the nature of a dogma, in fact) that the "ancient order of things" constitutes a definitive and essential pattern of the true church for all times and circumstances, and that the picture of the primitive church is so clearly given in the New Testament that this pattern can be unmistakably discerned by every devout and sincere believer. Time and more

mature scholarship have revealed that the second part of this proposition is obviously erroneous and that the first part is surely by no means obviously true. It is certain that the "restorationism" based on this premise, and so interpreted, was from the beginning an impossible ground for a united church.

But so sure were these pioneers that they and they alone had re-discovered "the ancient order of things" and that they and they alone had "restored the true gospel" that they found it impossible to recognize other religious bodies (i.e. "churches") as equally Christian. The more perceptive of them, such as Alexander Campbell, held that "there are Christians among the sects," but none of them believed that "the sects" were Christian. Hence they could not cooperate in the earlier union movements in Protestantism. There were two kinds of cooperation across denominational lines, and only two, which they regarded with sympathy and responded to in action. Both these took shape in the formative period of the Disciples—the middle third of last century. And in both of these our early leaders were active. But in neither were they initiators; they were followers. One of these consisted of the cooperative efforts being made by Protestants to circulate the Scriptures and stimulate their wider use. This was done through two types of activities—Bible Societies and Sunday School associations. The other of these consisted of the anti-Roman Catholic movements, of which there were several. These had the sympathy and support of a much broader public than active Protestant churchmen. "Nativism," the central thrust of which was anti-Romanism, was almost as popular then as "Americanism" is today. Alexander Campbell, and apparently most of his followers, would join anybody to undo "the Great Mother of Harlots."

But neither of these two movements were regarded, or regarded themselves, as in any way involving inter-denominational cooperation. They took shape as free associations of individual Christians. There were, however, several notable movements between 1835 and 1870 which intended to go much beyond these two and to challenge and dissolve denominational barriers—if not in organic union at least in mutual acceptance and fellowship, in cooperative evangelism and Christian service, and in corporate worship and joint planning. The first of these were mission societies organized to preach the gospel, especially to American Indians, the unchurched on the frontier and the heathen abroad. These had their prototypes in similar societies earlier formed in Britain and

on the Continent. While these too were voluntary organizations of individuals, they did by their nature involve their members across sectarian lines in a deeper and fuller expression of unity.

In keeping with this growing spirit of catholicity among Protestant Christians in America, the first of a number of conventions met on the Western Reserve in 1837 and continued annually for some years. The proposed "Plan" of union, recited, "That they who are fit to enter the Church in heaven are fit members of the purest church on earth," and "That faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the key that opens the door of the Church in heaven." It further declared that all that could be required as a basis for Christian union, therefore, is "satisfactory evidence" of faith in Christ, although this would obviously unite those "who widely disagree with each other on important religious subjects."

One might think that Disciples would have welcomed these sentiments and their implementation with open arms and rejoicing hearts. But such was not the case. Thomas Campbell, responding to these proceedings, did rejoice "that this all important subject of Christian union is beginning to awake the public attention," and confessed that this movement had arisen "beyond the bounds of our co-operative agency." Then he proceeded to reject the "propositions adopted" as "too indefinite" and to lay down what he regarded as prerequisites for union. These added to the confession of faith in Christ and baptism the significant further requirement that the baptised believer must "observe all things taught by the apostles as expressly recorded in the New Testament." And the content of these "all things" he spelled out in sixteen articles. Finally, he admitted that these sixteen points described what Disciples believed and practiced, but entered an apology that he was not concerned to defend "our faith and practice" but rather "to show that *we* understand the apostolic writings upon these subjects just as they were understood from the beginning."

Alexander Campbell had several things to say about these seminal stirrings of unity. While he too welcomed them as evidence of a desire for union, he was sure that "the union of sects would not be the union of Christians." And he ended by saying that if Jesus or the apostles were to return, they could not "fraternize" with these churches; in fact, there would be only two parties (his word was "professions") which they could possibly accept—"the Christians" and "the Disciples." But the former had dis-

qualified themselves by becoming Unitarian. "For surely there were no Unitarian Christians during the life of the apostles." (*Millennial Harbinger*, 1839, 19-25; 60-66; 134-144; 155-164; 212; 344, 345.)

There were other similar efforts to achieve the reunion of Christians in the middle decades of the century. The most notable of these was the World Evangelical Alliance, which such historians of church unity as Charles S. McFarland regard as the real beginning of the present ecumenical movement. It was organized in London in 1846. Following an initial error of Robert Richardson in interpreting Campbell's attitude toward and relationship to the alliance, an error perpetuated by later historians, we have supposed that our fathers welcomed this development and supported it. But quite the contrary was the case. Campbell not only declined the suggestion that he attend the organizational conference, he rejected completely the whole movement. And while giving a gentle nod of approval to its motivations (especially hoping that it would "give Popery a deeper wound"), he declared that he had no confidence in such schemes and would not engage himself in them. He particularly rejected the idea that "the proud Churchman, the humble Dissenter, the strict non-conformist Presbyterian, and the latitudinarian Methodist, the conscientious immersionist and the charitable sprinkler, could cordially meet, sing, pray, commune and cooperate" (*Millennial Harbinger* 1847, pp. 284-386; 445-448). Accordingly, when the American branch of the Alliance was formed in 1867 and when in the succeeding years organized chapters of the Alliance sprang up over most of America, Disciples were in no way involved. And as these and other developments toward the end of the century led to laying the foundations of the conciliar movement in Protestantism, there is no indication that Disciple leaders gave any support or recognition to them. Indeed the first recorded instance of any active involvement was in 1905; and it provoked an avalanche of hostile criticism. At the instigation of E. B. Sanford, the moving spirit and later the first executive of the Federal Council of Churches, J. H. Garrison presented a proposed resolution to the General Convention of Disciples at Omaha in 1905, which declared, with respect to the efforts then being made and which subsequently produced the Federal Council of Churches, that "we representatives of the Disciples of Christ . . . do hereby express our cordial approval of the effort to bring the churches into closer cooperation and . . .

pledge our hearty cooperation with this and every movement that has for its object the unification of all believers." This resolution was voted. But Sanford, who was present and by Garrison's arrangement had introduced the matter in a short speech, reported that, "The following half hour witnessed a scene of excitement that gave opportunity for individual expressions of bigotry and sectarianism beyond anything I had ever listened to" (E. B. Sanford, *Origin and History of the Federal Council*, 198, 199).

Until a half century ago all such efforts of Protestants to find ways to surmount their denominational impediments found Disciples in the position of almost if not absolute outsiders. They regarded themselves as such and were so regarded by others. We must in all honesty recognize the historical fact that our fathers did not lead the present movement toward Christian unity; they really arrived late, and even then with a platform which had to be radically amended before they could enter into conversation and cooperation with their fellow Christians. In short, it was not until Disciples had abandoned the principle of restorationism, at least in its literal meaning, and had sloughed off those elements which insisted on maintaining this principle that they could enter effectively into the ecumenical movement of our day.

THEOLOGY IN OUR SELF-IMAGE

A second feature of the self-image of Disciples has been that they are not a theological people, that theology is of dubious value at best and at worst, when expressed in creeds and confessions, is the cause of the divisions in the Body of Christ. But we are now having to re-examine both aspects of this view of ourselves.

As to the place of theology, we have recently come to realize that we in fact do not have an identifiable theology, that we have produced few if any leaders who can participate as peers, to say nothing of pioneers, in the present theological renaissance, and that a church cannot exist without a theology. It must either be nourished by its own consciously articulated understanding of its faith—which is the essence of theology—or it must live, like cut flowers, upon the sap in its stems, sustained temporarily by resources of understanding articulated by others and unconsciously appropriated. In the latter case its health and vigor are short-lived. And so at the moment no other major denomination in Christendom, I venture to say, is so frantically seeking a theology for itself as are the Disciples.

As to the place of creeds and confessions, our traditional persuasions that such are not only useless but positively vicious has prevented us from ever attempting to formulate a corporate testimony to what we believe and practice that gives identity and integrity to us as a people. But we are now uneasy in the realization that we do not know "what we believe." And if the numerous corporate and individual, official and unofficial efforts presently being made to state "What Disciples Believe" can be taken as evidence, we are now firmly convinced that we need a mutually recognizable and recognized confession—by whatever name. Also we are discovering that the view of our fathers that creeds and confessions always divide was a badly over-emphasized half-truth. For such formulations may unite as well as divide. This has been the function of the various "bases of union" which have made possible the several mergers and unions of churches in our day.

Now as a matter of fact, we have been neither non-theological nor creedless. But because we have wrongly supposed that theology and confessions of faith were barriers to union, and even worse, were substitutes of "human traditions" for revealed truths, our theology and our creed have been formulated and maintained *sub rosa*. As a consequence they have generally been confused and confusing. Moreover, they have not served to maintain freedom of conscience but have at least sometimes vested tyrannical power in individuals and unauthorized institutions. For we have had many notable, but not well-known cases of heresy in our history, where the condemned parties were judged by a law no one could exactly identify, on charges that were not clearly formulated, and by courts or judges that had no constitutional authority. One of the more notable of these cases may serve to illustrate the point.

In the 1850's Jesse B. Ferguson of Nashville, Tennessee, one of the greatest preachers and most brilliant editors we ever had, was driven out of the churches because of his views on other than the minimal creed always openly insisted upon, though never called a creed: the "one fact" of the Incarnation, and the "one institution" of baptism. He appealed to two principles in Disciple tradition: first, freedom of opinion and exemption from creedal demands; and second, congregational autonomy. As to the latter, his congregation supported him loyally. But Campbell went to Nashville to support the faction that had seceded from Ferguson's congregation. And his weight did the trick. As to the former, the right of conscience as against the requirement of an unwritten

creed, or of "pure doctrine," Campbell contended in the long and bitter controversy that raged, that while he defended the "political" rights of conscience, no man could hold such opinions as Ferguson held and remain "amongst us." "Have we no discipline, no tribunal?" he asked. "Must we have all sorts of opinions, of doctrines, of religious romance, preached, printed and published to the world and never call the propagators of them to account?" (*Millennial Harbinger*, 1854, 223). When Ferguson replied that this was strange language for "a people who professed to have renounced all ecclesiastical assumption," the Bethany bishop retorted: "What in reason's name does the man mean! Did he dream that among us there neither is, nor was, nor ever could be heresy!!!" (*ibid.*, p. 565.)

Our fathers quite correctly saw that some checks must be held on who is and who is not an acceptable member of any church, else all lines of distinction fade away. They saw, from their not too accurate knowledge of church history, that creeds threaten freedom. But they did not understand that a creed, or something that functions like one, is necessary for the integrity of any Christian community. And because they denied in words what they were actually practicing in deeds, they found themselves involved in both anarchy and tyranny. For in the absence of law, discipline must be exercised extra-legally.

Closely related to our ambiguous attitude toward creeds has been our strictures against theology. One of the charges against Ferguson was that he was Unitarian. In recent decades it has been fashionable to say that in so far as we have had any theology it has been non-Trinitarian, anti-Calvinistic and purely "biblical." Now as a matter of fact, there is a great measure of truth in the view that our fathers went back to the Bible not only for their ideas but for the language of their theology. And herein lay much of their strength. But many of them, including Alexander Campbell were confessedly theological. Campbell lectured on theology to his Bethany students, and called it such. He insisted that no one could be an intellectually mature Christian without that discipline. "Theology, sometimes called *Divinity*," said Campbell in one of these lectures, "is the knowledge of God—the science of His being and perfections. . . . Theology . . . is simply that knowledge of God which we acquire from His works and His word" (*ibid.*, 1953, 285, 286).

Campbell and most of his followers, moreover, were confessed Trinitarians. Although he did not like some of the "metaphysical" speculations sometimes associated with this view, Campbell asserted it in the work that more than any other was taken as the formulation of Disciple orthodoxy. "No one believes more firmly than I this mysterious, sublime, and incomprehensible plurality and unity in the Godhead . . . so essential to the mediatorship of Christ, that it is impossible to make any real and divine proficiency in the true knowledge of God, of man, of reconciliation, . . . without a clear and distinct perception of it as well as a firm and unshaken faith in it" (*Christian System*, p. 25, cf. *Millennial Harbinger*, 1857, pp. 5-9). And with this view Scott agreed: "Trinity with unity is the true theology" (*Messiahship*, p. 283). But Stone was a bit too rationalistic to be able to hold the kind of a dialectic between reason and faith which Campbell held and, so while confessing the pre-existence of Christ, would not accept the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. It was Campbell's and not Stone's views on this question, however, which informed Disciple theology until the opening of the present century.

Moreover, the theological position of these early leaders was that of a modified Calvinism. "The granite basis of his theology," said a contemporary and admiring journalist of Campbell after listening to him preach on the Western Reserve, "retained the genuine imprint of the most essential Calvinistic dogma" (A. G. Riddle, *The Portrait*, p. 130). This may be considered an inexperienced opinion, and perhaps it was. But it was accurate description. It is easy to point out the Calvinistic basis of not only Campbell's theology but of the whole of the thought of Disciples for three quarters of a century. Confirmation of this—without arguing the case—comes from a rather surprising source. In 1899 a number of Disciple theologians founded one of the most interesting of the many free-wheeling institutions for which they are noted—the Congress of Disciples. A young theologian, then teaching in Butler College, Indianapolis, making the first address of this first meeting, and so far as I can find, making his first appearance in print when his address was subsequently published, urged Disciples to recover their theological heritage. His subject was, "The Value of Theology." His name was Edward Scribner Ames. It is a remarkable statement. "Nowhere has theology been denounced more persistently than in the pulpits of the Disciples of Christ," he observed, and then went on to say, quite correctly, "strange as

it may seem, nowhere has theology been heard more." He then sums up what he understood, and again correctly, the theology of Campbell to have been:

"His theology is easily recognized as modified Calvinism, and he himself understood it to be such, although he preferred not to have it labeled. It was the name rather than the substance of Calvinism which he rejected" (*Our First Congress*, pp. 28, 29, 40).

The modification of Calvinism by the early makers of our tradition consisted in the rejection of two of its tenets as they were promulgated evangelistically on the frontier. One of these was the doctrine of predestination, which they saw as compromising or even denying the freedom of man. The other was the closely related doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, which appeared to make salvation an irrational miracle of God and to rob man of all capacity for rational response. They defended their position chiefly in Scriptural terms. But their presuppositions on which this modification was made rested on their estimate of the nature of man. And while they never denied the universal sinfulness of man and his utter incapacity to attain any knowledge of God and His will except as God took the initiative in revealing Himself and thus found their hope of redemption not in man's natural powers and capacities but only the grace of God, neither did they see man as unable to respond to God's grace except by a special miracle.

The major virtue in the theology of these early Disciples at its best was perhaps not its Calvinism (in many respects more accurately Augustinianism), but in two other insights—one of which has been rather faithfully preserved in our self-image through the years, the other of which we are rediscovering through certain emphases in contemporary thought. The one is that there is only one essential article of faith, namely, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior (although this has often been obscured by our contention that to confess this faith properly requires that we obey Christ in all things taught by His apostles). All else is doctrine; that is, theology, which Campbell and others rightly understood to be reason understanding faith. The other is that God's revelation is in what Campbell called "facts" or "things done," but which we today more commonly call "events." Said Campbell, "History is therefore the plan pursued in both Testaments," and this "has to do with

facts—and religion springs from these.” They did not have the term “salvation-history” (*Heilsgeschichte*), but they would have readily understood it.

As we examine and revise the features of this second aspect of our self-image, we find that in its uncorrected form it constitutes a barrier to union with our fellow Christians, since it deprecates or even repudiates what practically the whole Christian community from at least the second century has regarded as essential to the preservation and proclamation of Christian faith; namely, the continual effort to explore the theological dimensions of that faith and to formulate in acceptable terms what seem to be its essential meaning. That this has often resulted in the substitution of theology for faith and a creed for Christ we must continue to see as clearly as did our pioneers. But we must not throw out the baby with the bath quite so completely as did they.

The requirements here would seem to be two. In the first place, we must recover from our traditional allergy to everything that can be labeled a “creed.” This has been the great scare-word of our brethren. But we have always had one, which has been many times unofficially and even surreptitiously stated, and therefore rather badly stated. Now we are aware that we must articulate “what we believe” for our own sakes, but more especially for the sake of our conversations with others who demand to know what it is that distinguishes us from other bodies of Christians, that gives us our identity and our integrity. And so long as we are unable to tell them, such conversations remain rather confusing to both parties. And if we are ever to reach the point of seriously considering union with any denomination or denominations, we shall have to enter into negotiations to this end on the basis of some statement of those convictions and persuasions which we regard as constituting the ground of our own identity and integrity and worthy of preservation. Such a formulation may well be in the nature of a testimony to our faith rather than a test of orthodoxy.

In the second place, if we are to participate effectively in the present search for unity, we must enter into theological encounter among ourselves and with the church ecumenical, both as a necessary means for moving toward an acceptable articulation of our faith for ourselves, and also as an essential condition of reaching a mutual understanding of the possible bases of that anticipated unity.

In the absence of these conditions, we shall find our spokesmen in the position of having to represent a communion for whom they have really no power to speak. For while the ultimate test of any such negotiations is whether the agreements reached are accepted by the churches by and large, the initial basis should be *qualified* spokesmen. And to continue to repeat the well worn cliché, "Nobody can speak for the Disciples," is an obstacle which we should undertake to remove or surmount.

ASSOCIATION, CHURCH, DENOMINATION IN OUR SELF-IMAGE

This brings us to consider a third aspect of our self-image. One reason why our fathers rejected theologies and creeds—or thought they did so—was their conviction that these served only to create and maintain what they called "sects and parties" but what we should more correctly call denominations. Although they occasionally used the term denomination with reference to themselves, they characteristically insisted that they were not a denomination in the ordinary understanding of the term. For "to advocate the cause of unity while espousing a party" appeared to them to be ridiculous. Moreover they regarded the churches of the Restoration as being of a different order from the "sects and parties" from which they thought they had freed themselves. These existed because they had departed from the faith; we existed because we had recovered the true faith. Accordingly, except in limited circles and that quite recently, we have looked upon ourselves as being something other than a denomination.

There are two important elements of truth in this view. The first is that we did not desire or intend to be any kind of a separate party as distinct from the True Church. We intended to be and thought that we could be nothing but the Church of Christ. But in fighting against denominationalism, we, too, became a denomination. It was an ironic development in which our wills were overturned by the situation against which we fought. And we have been compelled to see that so long as the Church of Christ remains divided, we cannot realize its unity even for ourselves. "If any are in schism, all are in schism," is the wise word of the Archbishops' Commission on Faith and Order of the Church of England. We now know how true this is.

The second element of truth is that we were not a denomination properly so called until quite recently. We were a sect. In fact, only in the present generation have we attained the stature

of a denomination, having shed the habiliments of the sect with which we were born. But now we are a denomination, and our only alternative is to be something worse.

As we have come in recent years to face this unhappy choice, we have tended to react in one of three ways. For many of us, and for all of us officially, to be a denomination among denominations and thus openly to perpetuate the unhappy and sinful disunity of the Church of Christ and confess the failure of our original intention is so distasteful that we shrink from admitting the fact. These cling to the earlier self-image that we are something other than a denomination. Accordingly we cannot yet pronounce the word *denomination* at least officially or even publicly. We thus continue to use euphemisms, the most familiar of which are, of course, "our brotherhood," and "our communion."

Some of us, on the other hand, regarding freedom as the primary value to be conserved in our religious life and being convinced that institutional unity and spiritual freedom always stand in antithetical if not exclusive relations, find that being a separate body is a necessary condition of freedom. Accordingly these among us see the denomination as having such positive value that we cannot abandon nor seriously qualify it (though these may shun the term itself). We can only hope, therefore, for some kind of spiritual unity—mutuality of love and cooperation in good works—while preserving the principle and practice of separate denominational institutions. In short, the denomination is good; let us guard it well.

Finally some of us see the denomination as essentially divisive and sectarian, the fruit of our collective and individual sin and an unmitigated evil. So long as it remains, these would hold, it remains an insurmountable barrier to the unity of the church. Denominationalism as a religious form is essentially divisive and sinful. It must be repudiated. But the advocates of this view have not been able to offer any substitute except in idealistic terms—a goal to be sought and a norm by which to judge our situation. How to transform the denominational churches into the unified church remains the unsolved, and for the present at least, the insoluble problem.

There is no doubt that not only for Disciples but for the church ecumenical the nature and status of the denomination and its relation to the One Holy Apostolic Catholic Church constitutes a major issue. One aspect of that issue is that we have not been

able adequately to understand and interpret the nature of the denomination. Much learning and skill has gone into efforts to understand the church as such, and an impressive body of literature on the theology of the church has recently taken shape. But there is no similar corpus of writing on the denomination. We have done very little toward formulating a theology of the denomination.

On the other hand, very impressive and illuminating sociological studies of the denomination have been made in recent decades. And these do throw considerable light upon the theological understanding of the denomination. Since the confusion among Christians generally and Disciples in particular stems in large part from our lack of understanding of what the denomination really is, it is important that we seek such understanding. This will require that we use the disciplines of history, sociology and of theology. This short paper does not provide space for more than a statement of the problem and a tentative suggestion of some lines of advance. But this much does seem to be indicated.

We may begin with the well known typology of Troeltsch, according to which all religious institutions (for him as well as for us in this study attention is confined to Christian institutions) are to be understood as of two general types. The one he called the "church-type church." This in simplest terms is that kind of church which regards itself as the one true church, which exists in a historical and political situation in which it enjoys a certain monopoly (typically an established church), is accorded and accepts for itself responsibility for the whole of society and embraces in its fold everybody and everything in that society. While it is subject to cultural influence, it characteristically stoops to culture to conquer it, and thus demands conformity to its own standards which it regards as ultimately derived from the revealed will of God. Mediaeval Catholicism was its purest representative, but the major churches of the Reformation in Europe also exhibited this type.

Over against this type, in Troeltsch's view, was the "sect-type church." The sects were pluralistic only in the sense that they were many, not in the sense that any of them recognized others as being equally the church. They had become church bodies by repudiation of the generally recognized church; they were rebels against their surrounding culture and protestors against acculturation. Accordingly they demanded conversion of their members and tokens mutually acceptable that their members had

separated themselves rigidly from the world and from the corrupt church. These tokens consisted both of pure doctrine (usually tested by some ideal of the original church) and a rigorously disciplined life. The sect was thus a tightly bound exclusive group (There was in Troeltsch's typology a third type, the "spiritual-type" which must be neglected here).

Much refinement and improvement of this too simple typology has been made by more recent studies. The most useful revision, it seems to me, has been done by Howard Becker and by Joachim Wach. Becker delineates two other religious types. Of these the one is the "cult"—an amorphous, loosely-knit, usually esoteric group (e.g. Christian Science, Ethical Culture, Mormonism, et al.), which we may dismiss for present purposes. The other is the denomination. A chief defect of Troeltsch's scheme is that it neglects the denomination. This defect both Becker and Wach try to remedy. Becker sees the denomination to be the sect (which he defines essentially as does Troeltsch) "in an advanced stage of development and adjustment." This advancement and adjustment results in radically altered self-consciousness and relationship to other churches and to the secular world. Wach, much more sensitive than Becker to the theological aspects involved and also more aware of some of the historical complexities in the development of Christianity, omitting the "cult" of Becker, also sees religious bodies as falling into three types, corresponding generally to the classification made by Becker.

The relevance of these studies for our present situation lies in their analysis of the distinctive self-evaluation and conscious relationships which these bodies characteristically maintain, especially toward the fact of the divided church and the task of seeking its re-unification. The "church-type church"—which Becker more appropriately calls the "ecclesia" and Wach the "ecclesiastical body"—is distinguished by the fact that in its self-image, its intention, and its relationships with other churches, it regards itself as the only real church. All other pretended churches are in schism; and thus, cut off from the source of life for the church, these are essentially dead. They do not exist as *church*. This type of church thus supposes that it escaped completely the sin of division. The true church is one, namely, itself. While the Reformation churches modified this view by allowing that the true church is wider than the institutional church, being "invisible," they shared this complacency. There is another type of church which

likewise thinks itself to have escaped the sin of division, being the true church. This, as suggested above, is the sect. Despite great differences in other important matters, it shares with the "ecclesia" a self-image of purity of doctrine and of life, the intention of being the only true church, and a relation of exclusiveness. Accordingly neither of these types of churches can sustain a relation of cooperation and mutuality with another church. Churches of these types do not admit that another church is its equal.

Now a denomination is defined by a sharp difference at this point which distinguishes it from both the ecclesia and the sect. It is that type of religious society which sees itself not as the whole church or as the one true church, but rather as one church among many equal churches—equal, that is, in their respective relations to the Church of Christ. Moreover, it intends to function not for itself alone but on behalf of the whole church. In receiving members into itself it recognizes that these may leave it and go into another denomination without leaving the church as such. There is a free interchange of members and ministers among denominations, at least ideally. This ideal is violated in practice where the self-image of either the ecclesia or the sect remains to confuse and corrupt the denomination. Moreover, the denomination, unlike either ecclesia or sect, has a dialectical tension with its culture. It recognizes the necessities and virtues resident in secular society and attempts to sustain a creative relationship to these. It guards them, fosters them, usually turning over to secular institutions created and sustained thereby many of its own responsibilities, such as education, welfare services, and others. But it also holds its culture under judgment, which it affirms to derive from the Word of God which is committed to it.

This short and quite inadequate excursus into the theory of sociological types of religious bodies with some allusion to their theological correlates has been made in the hope that it may throw some light on how Disciples should understand their own tradition and how they may use it as a ground of seeking unity. It may also qualify the kind of unity for which we may hope. I have said that we have become only recently a denomination and that we have become such as we have emerged from the status of a sect. This is true. This emergence is typical of the sect. But Disciples have had a particularly rough time of it because of certain factors in our heritage and our history. The most troublesome fact, and also one of the most constructive, was that while we were in truth

a sect for some generations, we were a sect beset by inner tensions. We were a sect with a catholic mind. We shared the magnificent illusion characteristic of the typical sect that all Christians should and any group of Christians could escape the divisions in the Body of Christ by simply getting out of every kind of religious society except the One True and Pure Church. Thus we contended that we were "Christians only"—not Baptist Christians, or Methodist Christians, or Presbyterian Christians, but just Christians. But it took us less than a generation to come face to face with a very embarrassing question: Should we be "Christian" Christians or "Disciple" Christians? And we faced another troublesome dilemma. We said that while we were Christians only, we were not the only Christians. What then should be our attitude toward other Christians. Our answer was that while we could, with some ambiguity, recognize them as individual Christians, we could not recognize the churches which they constituted and maintained as having any justification for existence. Hence we could not maintain what we now see is an essential attitude of denomination to denomination.

Moreover we were a sect, not only in this aspect of our exclusive self-image, our intentions and our relationships, which rested upon our view that we were free of the corruptions of doctrine, church order and life that spoiled other churches, we were also a sect in our attitudes toward and relationships with our culture. Our churches were rural with idealized frontier virtues. They despised urban vices and deprecated sophistication. Their members were "poor in this world's goods" and proud of it, poured scorn on the fine churches of the "sects," on the "Reverend" ministers who had seminary degrees, who read their prayers, had organs and choirs in their sanctuaries, and otherwise opened their doors to let the world come in. The open gate to all this corruption, as they saw it, was infant baptism, by reason of which everybody in the society would also be in the church, were it not resisted, and thus no distinction could be made between the church and the world.

Then civilization and prosperity overtook them. They became a self-conscious body which required its own corporate institutions for education, evangelization and welfare. They had to have resources for the establishment and maintaining of these. They began to acquire fine church buildings (in 1852 J. B. Ferguson preached in a \$30,000 building to the elite of Nashville). Soon

they demanded educated and cultured preachers; presently both preachers and churches wanted and acquired colored glass windows, carpets, choirs, organs and all the trimmings. Then these "hired pastors" found themselves associating with and fraternizing with the pastors of other churches in the towns and cities. It was not long until the idea took possession of them that there was really not much difference between them.

But these cultural changes, with their theological implications, were offensive to those of conservative sentiments, especially those in rural areas and the rural-minded in urban areas. They were especially offended by this fraternization with and recognition of "the sects," which was regarded as the ultimate betrayal of the principles of the Restoration. Many factors entered to widen the growing breach. One of the major factors was the conflict between North and South in the Civil War and its implications. The sect-minded tradition found ready support in the South, where it was expedient to insist that Christians should not use the state for their moral purposes, and that those who supported the use of either law or military force were "political" and "warriors" rather than Christian. This was the position of those who led the defection; and although the specific reasons given were in terms of public worship and denominational polity, it is easy to see that what actually clashed in the first major schism suffered by the Disciples was the sect-mind and the growing denominational mind. And the defecting churches were principally the rural and the Southern churches. Those churches which remained with the denominational body after 1906 were by no means agreed on this underlying issue. And it became obvious within a few years that the schism had not removed the sect mind from the body of Disciples, but rather that a considerable part of this body was still dominated by the self-image of a communion possessing a unique purity, which was determined to remain exclusive, refusing any relations of mutuality and cooperation with other denominational churches. With the rise of the conciliar movement and the participation of the Disciples in its various expressions these sect-minded churches accused their brethren, quite correctly, of "recognizing the denominations." Also they rebuked them for alleged surrender to "the world" and to "infidelity," of becoming "modernists" because they no longer held views of revelation and authority which would support the earlier program of restorationism based on a definitive pattern in the New Testament. This, aided and

abetted by institutional and personal rivalry, has more recently led to a second schism, one consequence of which has been to remove just about the last remnants of the sect-image and its implications from our midst.

Now at the beginning of the second half of our second century, the Disciples of Christ think and act very largely in denominational terms. But this is a new and rather unfamiliar role for us. And it is complicated for us by the group memory of a self-image that is quite inconsistent with this role. Being a denomination confronts every such Christian body with inconsistencies and conflicts. For all such bodies a crucial issue is whether the denominational form should be repudiated and ended as quickly as possible; and if so, how can this be brought about. Disciples of an earlier day had a very simple answer to both parts of this deeply troublesome question. W. T. Moore, in his *Comprehensive History*, summarizes and dismisses this view in an impressive if whimsical manner. He speaks of this earlier view which the Disciples had of unity as that of the unity of the Anaconda and the Rabbits—very nice for the snake but not so happy for the bunnies. We know now that union by one church swallowing up the others was never a possibility nor a desirability. And if we decline to accept this figure of Moore's as descriptive of Disciples at any time, we must still admit that unity is no more possible of attainment by all Christians stepping out of churches which are corrupt and divisive into a realm of unity and purity than it is by the process of absorption. Whatever unity the churches actually enjoy in any foreseeable future must be realized within and by means of the denominational structures of the churches. This does not foreclose the possibility of consolidations of many kinds—mergers and federations. But what emerges out of all such will be only new denominations.

The role given Disciples, it would seem, is to be, without inhibition and confessedly, a denomination among denominations, claiming no special virtue or purity over others. But this does not mean that we have no special gifts. We have, as do others. These we may, without pride but in gratitude, bring to the counsels of our brethren, who may do the same with their own.

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES IN THE SEARCH FOR UNITY

In this brief examination of three major aspects of our self-image by reference to some elements in our tradition I have tried

to indicate that in each case we possess both assets and liabilities in the search for the unity of the church. Let me now try to summarize these.

With respect to our tradition of restorationism, on the negative side, it is clear that this is no longer a valid concept in the form in which it was first understood and was propagated in the nineteenth century. And in abandoning this proposed ground of unity we must also abandon the view that we led the way to a reunification of the broken church or offered a possible basis for such unity. Actually the emergence of the Disciples and our development as a separate religious body added as much confusion as clarity to the issues involved and contributed as much to division as it did to unity of the church. On the positive side, on the other hand, the catholic impulse and intention of our movement, when set free from the incubus of this type of restorationism, has made it possible and relatively easy for a large part of the churches stemming from this movement to enter readily and eagerly into all kinds of expressions of Christian unity—all kinds except one. We have not yet been able to enter a major merger of denominations (if we except the instances on the mission fields). But even more, in finding in the apostolic church not only the genesis but also the genius of the true church, we (but not we alone) articulated the essential ground for whatever unity we may hope for. The slogan "union in truth" does have significance, especially if it is understood to mean union in Christ who is the Truth. This Christ however must be understood in terms congenial to the whole community of Christians—what W. T. Moore has called "the composite Christ"; that is, the Christ of history and of faith as revealed to and within the experience of believers generally.

This leads us to say, with respect to our traditional attitudes toward theology and creeds, that we must penetrate beneath the form of words by which our fathers expressed their opposition to these concepts. For we can know the "composite Christ" only through and by means of the theological tradition of the universal church, which characteristically has found its formulations in the creeds of the church. If we ignore or repudiate these and the theological enterprise which gave birth to them, we shall but shut ourselves off from the continuing community which has preserved, interpreted and made relevant for each passing age and circumstance the truth of Christ—partial, mixed with error, and sometimes insisted on with arrogance, to be sure, yet despite the earthen

vessels in which it has been given and preserved, the only truth the church has been entrusted with.

Finally, with respect to our status as a denomination, we face here the central paradox not only of our own existence as a separate religious body but of all Christendom. Even more, we experience here a particular aspect of our total human predicament. For here we find ourselves involved in and delimited by evils which we inherited and yet from which we can claim no exemption. They are our sins as well. And we must not imagine that we can in any manner escape either the actual involvement in them or guilt for them. If we resolve, so to speak, not to commit the sin of division, we nevertheless do commit it. And while we must needs therefore, to use Luther's terms, sin boldly, by accepting and fulfilling the role of a denomination, we must do so with a tortured conscience and a prayer for forgiveness. And in our present struggles to become and be a responsible denomination—an effort we cannot afford to relax—we are beset by a very dangerous beguilement. Seeing how unavoidable it is that we be a denomination, or what is worse, continue to be a sect, and seeing how necessary it is for us to development and guard with jealousy the corporate and co-operative institutions required by a denomination, we are likely to be over-protective of these new powers. These are necessary, but they are also insidious.

"Our age is involved in irony," Reinhold Niebuhr has observed with rare insight, "because so many dreams of our nation have been so cruelly defeated by history." What is true of America is also true of the most American of all Protestant denominations, the Disciples of Christ. Our very existence as a religious body is due to the defeat by history of the intentions of our founding fathers. If we determine to remain a separate body, we contribute to the sin of division. If we undertake to rewrite for ourselves a *Last Will and Testament*, determined to die and sink into the One Body of Christ, we cannot do so any more than did they. And yet if we will not to do so, we stultify our very genius. In any event, we continue to share in the disunity of that Body. This is the irony not only of our own history, *mutatis mutandis*, but of the Church itself.

There would seem to be only one way in which we can deal with this fact of our existence. If we accentuate our vanity, as we have sometimes done, by pretending that we more than others desire or know how to achieve the purity and unity of the church, we

only fall into the comic and make ourselves ridiculous. But if we recognize and confess that we, along with our fellow-Christians of whatever name or sign, are for the time being and for whatever time we are able to foresee, involved in the sins of our fathers to which we too have given our consent, and if we confess in contrition our own guilt and penitence, the irony in which we are involved may thus be dissolved into tragedy by our voluntary acceptance of this continual crucifixion of Christ. And by bringing forth fruits worthy of this repentance, we may find even now the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the nature of the unity of the New Testament Church, in so far as this concerned 1) its beliefs, 2) its cult, and 3) its institution?
2. What is the rationale for thinking that the apostolic church constitutes a pattern for the church in history? Is that church essentially imitable?
3. What function have creeds and confessions actually served in the history of the churches? Have they always been divisive? Have they been necessary instruments for unity?
4. How far and in what terms are Christian unity and denominationalism compatible?
5. Do Disciples generally recognize that they are actually a denomination? How far and in what respects are we not a denomination?
6. Is it possible for Disciples to hope for actual realization of unity in the terms originally espoused by our pioneers? What in fact was the substance of this vision?
7. How far is freedom of conscience dependent upon remaining "creedless?"
8. A person who recently joined a Disciple congregation, coming from the Episcopal Church, remarked to friends that she was delighted to find that in becoming a Disciple she "did not have to believe a thing." What, if any, boundaries can our churches consistently insist upon?
9. Is it possible for Disciples (or any communion) to formulate a confession of faith without compromising the freedom of its members?
10. In respect to freedom, do Disciples enjoy more actual freedom of conscience than those denominations which retain and use historic confessions of faith?
11. What is the legitimate function of such confessions of faith? Does the phrase "a testimony but not a test" mean anything significant? Can a denomination promulgate a confession of its faith as a testimony without its becoming a test of orthodoxy?
12. What in fact has been the unifying principle or principles which have provided the ground of identity and integrity of the Disciples as a separate religious body?
13. What is the irreducible minimum of conviction which Disciples should insist upon in negotiating with other communions toward merger?

SPECIFIC ISSUES IN CHURCH MERGER

By W. B. BLAKEMORE

INTRODUCTION

WHAT are the issues involved in the possibility of merger between the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ? Any particular instance of merger must be studied at several levels. It must be considered in the light of the historic moment in which it is a proposal. It must be studied in terms of merger in the general sense. It must also be studied in terms of the implications of the particular concrete proposal for merger. These three levels constitute the outline of this paper. Under the section dealing with the historic moment, there will be only one major head. Under the section dealing with the general discussion of merger, there will be three major heads. In the section dealing with this particular proposal of merger between the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ there will be many heads.

I

THIS HISTORIC MOMENT

What is the situation at this moment regarding the possibility of merger for Disciples of Christ? It is probably the lowest that it has been in fifteen years. The reader will please distinguish between the terms "Ecumenical activity" and "merger." As regards ecumenical activity, the total possible involvement for Disciples is at present the highest it has ever been in history.

This increase in ecumenical activity is possible because Christians increasingly find ways of cooperating on specific practical items. To organize that increase, we are seeing a developing use of church councils and federations at local and state levels as well as national and world levels. Involvement in these organizations is constantly increasing the ecumenical activity available to Disciples of Christ. At the same time the possibility of merger for Disciples of Christ is at a very low point, lower than it has been for some years.

By the late forties, as the longed-for World Council of Churches came into being, an ecumenical surge had carried the Disciples of Christ into involvement in at least three series of conversations looking toward merger. As recently as 1950 we were very sure that merger with the American Baptists had a high order of probability. Second to that was the Greenwich Movement which was in second place only because its vastness implied a longer period for effecting it. Already in existence by 1950 was an International Convention resolution regarding our interest in the emergent United Church of Christ. But this possibility was the one which stood in third rank.

In 1958-59 we face an entirely different ordering. The issue of union with the American Baptists is almost dead. It is obvious with respect to the Greenwich Movement that the time table for effecting its plan of union has become very much more extended than was expected in 1950. The only probable merger now confronting Disciples of Christ is with the United Church of Christ, and that probability has a certain remoteness.

This decrease in the probability of merger for Disciples of Christ is true only for the Disciples in the continental United States of America. In other parts of the world, conversations by Disciples with other communions looking toward merger are very lively. For instance, in Canada there are conversations taking place between Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. Disciples in New Zealand are seriously studying proposals for a Protestant merger in those islands. In areas which were recently mission fields, such as the Philippines, Japan and the Belgian Congo, Disciples of Christ are vigorously participating in the emergence of "The Younger Churches." Our present paper, however, concerns itself only with the situation confronting Disciples of Christ in the United States of America.

The following facts must be taken into account in assessing the probability of merger between Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. What has occurred so far in the formation of the United Church of Christ is that the general bodies of the Congregational-Christian Church and the Evangelical and Reformed Church combined themselves in 1957 into a General Synod. This combination was done in terms of a *Basis of Union* previously approved by each of the general boards separately. The newly formed General Synod has set up four temporary sub-bodies:

- a. A Commission to Prepare a Constitution

- b. A Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith
- c. The Committee of Twenty on methods of solicitation, collection and disbursement of missionary, benevolent and administrative funds
- d. An Executive Council to further the Synod's work between its general meetings.

In other words, there is still a tremendous amount of work to do before the details of the Union are effected.

Knowing of the interest of Disciples of Christ in merger with them, the United Church of Christ has invited the Disciples to send observers to the Commission to Prepare a Constitution and the Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith. Gaines Cook is our representative to the Constitution Commission with W. J. Jarman as alternate and Hampton Adams and George Buckner as advisory committee. W. W. Sikes is our representative to the Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith with Robert Tobias as alternate and Howard Short, Ronald Osborn and W. R. Baird comprising the advisory committee. These observers may already have some idea of the time that will be required to complete the union of the Congregational-Christians and Evangelical and Reformed Church into the United Church of Christ. One can hardly be more precise than to say it will take several years. But certain kinds of predictions can be made.

The work of completing the union can become abnormally extended in two ways. One of these ways will be interference from those opposed to the union. Such opponents have appeared both amongst the Congregationalists and amongst the Evangelical and Reformed, and in both instances the opposition has taken the form of litigation. Since the union in 1957, pleas by members of both former groups have been admitted to court. Litigation is dispiriting business, and it may hamper the work of unification gravely. It is a serious matter that within the last year opposition to the merger with the Evangelical and Reformed group has become vocal. Prior to the union most of us thought that the only serious opposition was amongst the Congregationalists. Even so, at the present time there is no reason to believe that these litigations will prove to be anything more than nuisance and a delaying action. However, even minority movements can sometimes gain unexpected force, and no surety that the United Church of Christ will effect its union can be given until these litigations are ended.

The second way in which the work of completing the union could become abnormally extended is by the discovery of irreconcilable problems by either the Commission Preparing a Constitution, the Commission Preparing a Statement of Faith, the Committee of Twenty on finances, or the Executive Council. Here again we may be speaking only of remote possibilities, and much will depend upon the preservation of the will to unite until the task is completed. There is every evidence that the will to unite is exceedingly strong and will result in the discovery of solutions for virtually every problem that will arise. But problems will arise, and no one can predict in advance how long their solution will require.

We must also remember that at the present time, Disciples of Christ are represented by only one observer in each of two commissions. This means that the present conversations of those commissions are no more than an encounter of the backgrounds and traditions of Congregationalism and the Evangelical and Reformed groups. One "observer" just does not provide for thirty "delegates" an encounter with that which the "observer represents." At the same time, we must not, because we are not deeply involved, discount the importance of the encounter which is taking place. But it will have to run its course, and if it results in full unification it may take some time for maturation before another encounter can be engaged in.

The fourth point for consideration is the fact that it is likely that there will be residual groups, either of Congregational-Christians or of Evangelical and Reformed, or perhaps of both. If such groups emerge, Disciples of Christ will have to take them into account as they consider the possibility of merger with the United Church of Christ. It will not be enough to dismiss such groups as sectarian and dissident unless it can be definitely known that this is the case. It will be necessary to discover at depth the reasons why some people of the uniting denominations have preferred to remain more as they originally were. This will be particularly true if there is a residual Congregational-Christian group since historically that group has been similar at many points to Disciples of Christ.

All of the above factors mean that there is a time element involved in any possibility of merger between Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. The historic moment is not one in which the possibility of merger is imminent. What it is not possible to discover at the present moment is whether the inevitable

time factor is likely to work for or to work against the probability of Disciple merger with the United Church of Christ. The time element may allow Disciples of Christ to "mature" in their readiness for merger. On the other hand, the time element may allow the development of such differences between Disciples and the United Church of Christ that the probability of merger fades. A great deal will depend on what happens to "the ecumenical atmosphere" in the days ahead.

II

THE GENERAL PROBLEMS OF MERGER: ORGANIC, UNIVERSAL, ESCHATOLOGICAL

This section of the paper might well be headed "The Nature of the Unity We Seek" because it raises the issue of whether the Church of Christ on earth can or must appear as a single universal organization. At the present time the phrase "the Coming Great Church" has some popularity. By the term, do we mean a single universal organization which will appear within history? That is what some people mean when they use the phrase. Others use the term rather in a normative sense than with any idea that it describes something that will emerge within history.

At the outset, it should be made clear that it does not necessarily follow that denominational merger is futile if it is decided that historically there will always be more than one denomination. But what is decided with respect to the idea of a coming great church will affect expectations regarding any particular merger and change the criteria by which its worth is judged.

First let us deal with the idea of organic union. What can be meant by the term "organic." It is a term which is used with very great frequency in the discussion of church mergers. Over and over it is said, "what we want is organic union." However, it is impossible to discover any common meaning to this term. It has been much abused and is about to a point where it will have to be dropped from wide-spread use, though there is one element of meaning in it which will need to be preserved.

The term "organic" in relation to church order is a relatively recent term, though the idea which is often identified by the term is a very old one. The organic theory of church order is normally contrasted with the covenant theory of church order. These two concepts historically have been paralleled by terms applied to the state: the organic theory of the state and the compact theory. In

the former, the state is looked upon as a body, as something given to groups of men as his body is given a man. In this view the state is primarily a "given" entity and should not be tampered with any more than a person should tamper with the physical body which has been given him. Therefore, the organic theory in general supports conservatism. The compact theory, on the other hand, sees the origin of the state in human decision, and the state is, therefore, rightfully amenable to changes in terms of human decision regarding what will be desirable. Similarly, the organic theory of the church looks upon it as a given body; the covenant theory looks upon it as originating in a covenant between man and God. The organic theory tends to support conservatism, the covenant theory change. However, the church covenant theory is not quite as adaptable to radicalism as is the compact theory of the state, because in the latter all parties to the compact are men, and in the covenant theory of the church, one party is God; radical or conservative alike can claim to say what it is that God says in making the covenant.

The proponents of these two views of the church can point to the origins of their respective theories in the earliest pages of the Old Testament, at every state of Judeo-Christian development, and in the ecclesiastical structures of the present moment. The definitive work regarding these two theories is a volume by F. W. Dillstone entitled *The Structure of the Divine Society*. The burden of this book's thesis is that while each theory explains certain elements of the church's existence, neither does justice to every aspect of its life.

For our purposes in this paper, however, the important distinction between these two theories is their ecumenical implications. The organic theory points very strongly to unity of church organization. From this point of view it does not make sense to justify denominationalism by saying that there can be one spirit and many forms in which it expresses itself. The meaning read into the biblical idea of one spirit and one body is that there is one church organization and unless that is so there is inevitably diversity of spirit. It is for this reason that the term "organic" union has been seized upon by those who want to drive toward a single church within history.

But there are certain unpalatable qualities that accompany the term when so used. It leads not only toward singularity of organization but toward the monolith. It leads toward the implication

that part of the organism may be destroyed to preserve the organism. Always lurking behind the organic theory when so interpreted is the possibility of the use of force to gain submission, the use of the inquisition to discover error and the "auto-da-fe" for its surgical eradication. No one has made this point more often than W. E. Garrison, and nowhere has he made it more clearly than in his recent book on the *Quest and Character of a United Church*. It must be said that the differing forms and specific agreements in a gathered church implied in the covenant theory may veil the shadow of the sectarian spirit with all its meanness, its slow destruction of the spirit, personal and collective, and its tendency to create within men that disgust for religious institutions which breeds the secular spirit.

While it is obvious that the term organic must be abandoned in any sense of indicating a singularity of visible structure, there is a meaning of the term "organic" recognized in any dictionary which should be preserved. In this meaning the term "organic" refers not to singularity of visible structure but to the basis of an organization's existence, that law or those laws by virtue of which it exists as such. The reference here is to whatever is constitutive of the organization or "constitutional" in the sense that Thomas Campbell was using the term when he wrote "the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one." In this sense the organic character of the church is, as the term has historically implied, already given, and therefore, is not that which we are seeking. Whatever else denominationalism may have destroyed, it has not destroyed the organic base of the church. For this reason, it may prove that writing a *Basis of Union* is far easier than producing a detailed constitution. The *Basis of Union* may have articulated only that which is common to all churches as their base without providing the specifications for the superstructure, and at that level troubles may yet arise.

The issue at hand becomes more pointed when we turn from the concept "organic union" to the idea of "the church universal." This issue can be illuminated by recounting an episode. At the conclusion of his Hoover lectures, Charles Clayton Morrison was entertained at a dinner party. Those present were asked to make comments upon the lectures. The main thesis of Dr. Morrison's lectures, later published as *The Unfinished Reformation*, is that the denominations have usurped functions and privileges that belong only to the whole church. This usurpation Dr. Morrison called

the "churchism" of the denominations, i.e. their insistence that they are church. This churchism, he said, is sin. Dr. Morrison's lectures certainly implied that there should be a church Universal in the historical sense (though he would have admitted it is a long, long way off, but we could make some move toward it by a rapid unification of North American Protestantism) and that to it should be returned those functions which belong to it which the denominations have usurped. At the dinner party when it came time for E. S. Ames to speak, he said: "As I listened to these lectures I was reminded of the story which Hegel tells of a man who ordered breakfast. The waiter set before him plums, prunes, peaches, apples, cherries, melons, grapes, apricots, and so on. The man rebuked the waiter with a sweeping gesture which knocked it all to the floor as he said, 'That's not what I want; bring me some fruit.'" If any one believes that the issue known in the middle ages as realism versus nominalism is dead, he is mistaken. It was fully alive in a 20th century dinner party of Disciples of Christ! And praise be, for the issue of nominalism versus realism is not dead. The issue is whether such an entity as The Church can only be really existent in a single general body or whether the church universal is a name referring to that which is general to all bodies. As the term "fruit" is a general term and there is no such thing as fruit other than apples, oranges, grapes, pears, etc., so Church Universal is a general term but with no real existence apart from the churches. Do we mean by the term Church Universal what the Roman Catholics and sectarians mean by the term? Or do we mean what I believe classic Protestantism has always meant—that no church may claim to be the Church Universal and that The Church has reality only in churches?

Here again, we would have to abandon "Church Universal" if it were taken over by those who want to mean by the term a single organization. But there is another meaning in the term which is valid and must be preserved. It is the meaning that inheres in the term "generic" rather than in the term "general." It is the sense of the fact that the churches come from some single source, that their universality is not in themselves but in their Creator. They proclaim, along with the spacious firmament, the ethereal sky, and the spangled heavens a great original. If this is the case, the term "church universal" does not have the practical implication of driving us into a unity of organization, for in the very nature of the case such a unity is impossible of achievement. It does drive us to

a conscientious examination of our conduct within the organizations which we have. It means that the aim of the ecumenical movement is not unity of organization but the achievement within every local congregation of the universal spirit, the sense of bondage and relationship to the whole, of participation in all the churches everywhere because of no other common denominators or factors than the origin of the church in the mind and heart and mighty acts of God. Another way of saying this is that the genius of the church can be seen in its genesis.

This point of view does not mean that we should forget about denominational mergers. It does mean that we should be clear about why we engage in them. We are not engaging in them because merger will follow merger until all have died the death and sunk into the body of Christ at large. We engage in them if they enhance our capacity to receive each other as Christians, to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same things, and to be joined together in the same mind and judgment. If the ecumenical aim is to die the death and sink into the body of Christ at large, every denominational merger intrinsically would be valid. If the ecumenical aim is to enhance the reception of each other by Christians, any merger which is only an achievement of bigness and enlarged power is invalid. In other words, I believe that Christian unity is a more fundamental term than church unity, and that the criterion for all church unifications is their contribution to the unity of Christians. Alexander Campbell used to make the point that a few large sects would be a far worse condition than many smaller and weaker sects. Unless we can be very sure that a single church is an historic possibility we must accept the implications of the continuity of differences. In fact, the question of how and wherein we are and shall be united is no more important than the question of how and wherein we are and shall be different. In other words, while the phrase "Christian divisions" is a contradiction in terms, there is no more contradiction in the term Christian differences than in the terms Christian similarities and Christian unity.

The term eschatology introduces us to yet another dimension of the issue, and it need not be long labored. At the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox, according to their custom, dissociated themselves from any utterance which implies that the Orthodox Church is not that church which Christ bought with his own blood and presents faultless and with-

out stain before Himself. My own comment on this Orthodox position, that the present historic Orthodox Churches are a perfect expression of church, is that the point of view is eschatologically defective. It appropriates to the historic church an ultimate character that is rather the end or aim of the church. In other words, we need to confront the fact that perfect unity is eschatological in character.

Those who strive to establish something that they believe would be a perfect unity are trying to precipitate into history what belongs to the ultimate. We should recognize that just as it is false to believe that we can restore an original pattern, it is equally false to say that we can precipitate into history an ultimate pattern. But that is what some seem to want to do. Precipitationism is a sort of reverse form of restorationism. Nonetheless, we know that the churches are a foretaste of divine things, a colony of heaven, as well as a continuation on earth of the Incarnation, the Body of our Lord.

Of course, it must immediately be said that it is exceedingly difficult to talk about the ultimate condition of the church. The problem is very similar to that of discussing the ultimate condition of the physical universe. There are two leading astronomical theories at the present time. Which do you accept? Do you with Fred Hoyle believe in a steady state universe in which there has always been stars, galaxies, matter, energy, life, etc., about as there is now, but with an ever continuing expansion involving the creation of new energy in interstellar space? If you go along with that point of view, you are in effect saying there will always be denominations, and mergers are not as important as they may seem. Or are you a follower of George Gamow and the theory that what is now a far-flung universe was once an energy compacted into something the size of a tea cup which explosively expanded creating elements and matter and light and suns, planets and galaxies, all of which are thrust outward but will reach some limit of remoteness wherein even matter cannot be sustained. Then a shift in the balance of things will bring it all back together into something like the original unity? That is not unlike the traditional Disciple plea that the church was one at the beginning, that we've gotten far from each other but can be brought back together by a shift that restores the ancient order of things. Is denominationalism the "steady state" that will pertain perpetually, or is the

ecumenical movement truly a cosmic shift, ecclesiastically speaking, which will return us to the one fold?

The use of this astronomical illustration sharpens the problem of discussing the church as given. If there is anything that is given, it is the vast physical universe. Its givenness is such that astronomy and astro-physics are descriptive sciences and we can do little but wait for the future shapes of the universe to emerge in order to describe them. This is parallel to some fundamentalist ideas about the church.

But is the church given like that? The vast ranges of space—electric, energetic, and physical—are the realm in which human decision counts for the least. Surely the case can be made for the position that whatever it is about the church that is God-given, it is also the realm in which human decision counts for the most. Herein there is a vast degree of freedom, men making the church, even though no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ. "Now if any one build on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble—each man's work will become manifest for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done." (I Cor. 3:11-13) Let us be sure to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and stop appropriating God's name to sanction man's work. Let every man build—as he must build—but let us recognize even Church as a human-divine institution.

The fact that it is only foundation that is given and all else is man's handiwork is what the liberals knew so well. Church is always our comprehension and understanding of the highest values—our effort to give influence to what we believe is the best. On many a student application the answer to "Why are you entering a church vocation?" is "Because it will *give* me the greatest possible opportunity to make my influence felt the most." Givenness of the church, yes. Highest realm of human freedom, yes. The church as we know her is most glorious and most frail, for in our glory and frailty we are never able to escape the fact that though we often build her up we often tear her down.

Up to this point our eschatological wanderings have dealt only with the problem of unity and plurality which accompanies the terms organic and universal. But where the term organic points us to the present constitutive bases of the churches, and where the term universal points us to the great Original, the term eschato-

logical does point us to the future. It points to the fact that included in the criteria by which we judge any union must be the consequences of it. What will be its practical results? When it has been in existence a while will the cause of the Kingdom of God in so far as we can delineate it in very practical terms be furthered?

We have a continuum of judgement with past, present, and future as three sources of criteria. Not only must any merger respond to the Will of God out of which it came, and the laws by which the church prevails; it must also respond to the judgment of its consummation of very specific items of progress in missions, benevolence, social influence, the spirit of intelligence, and an increase in our capacity to love God and our fellowman. And the Day will make manifest how every man has built.

Let us now move on from this second section and its general concerns to the very specific issues involved in the idea of merger between Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ.

III

SPECIFIC ISSUES IN A MERGER BETWEEN DISCIPLES AND THE UNITED CHURCH

The United Church of Christ has come into existence on a *Basis of Union*. The document is about seventeen pages long, one half of it being devoted to the procedures by which the parallel foreign and home mission, benevolence, education and pension boards of the uniting denominations can be merged. This is a very technical half of the *Basis* and need not concern us much.

The *Basis of Union* starts with a preamble in which the uniting bodies point to four areas of agreement which they feel are adequate to validate uniting. These four areas are spirit, purpose, the substance of the Christian faith, and the essential character of the Christian life. For outsiders, like ourselves, there is no way in which we can judge whether there is unity of spirit. We can and do presume it in view of the continuing progress toward unity between the Congregational-Christians and the Evangelical and Reformed. We are able to judge that there is a unity of purpose since the Basis of Union does spell out many specific points of purpose. At least we can see the outline of ecclesiastical purpose and behavior. It is also possible on the pages of the document to discover what the uniting body feels is the substance of Christian faith. But there is no evidence presented by this document, or by anything else I have seen, which demonstrates that there is an

agreement on the essential character of the Christian life. Here again, we can and do presume that in the new church there is agreement on the character of the Christian life, though we are dealing in an area in which it is feelings rather than articulate statement which gives the United Church its evidence in the matter.

We should mention in passing that the document contains what seems to me to be one echo of the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery. It is the sentence: "Believing that denominations exist not for themselves but as parts of that Church, within which each denomination is to live and labor and, if need be, to die. . . ."

The preamble is followed by Article I which sets forth the name. Disciples historically have made such an issue over names, that perhaps it is best if in this paper we make no issue of the name of the United Church of Christ. However, there is an issue there, and we should be aware of the fact that for many denominations the name of the new denomination is presumptuous. Of course, they have always had this same feeling with respect to our use of the name Christian Church!

The second article of the basis of union deals with Faith, and herein are several issues for us to consider.

This article opens with the statement that the faith which unites the new church is "that faith in God which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments set forth, which the ancient Church expressed in the ecumenical creeds, to which our own spiritual fathers gave utterance in the evangelical confessions of the Reformation. . . ." We should notice that there is not here the anti-creedal attitude which Disciples historically held, but an acceptance and recognition of the ancient and Reformation confessions as having validity in their own time. The article then goes on to complete its first sentence by saying, "and which we are in duty bound to express in the words of our time as God Himself gives us light." Now here is an issue indeed for Disciples of Christ. I believe that many of our people now would acknowledge the significance of the ancient and Reformation confessions as historic testimonies of the faith, but many of these would not agree that we in our day are duty bound to build an "official" expression of them or a creed. Many Disciples would assert that we are duty bound to make available for other denominations some articulation of our most commonly held positions regarding the great theological topics. That we should explain ourselves more adequately and

become responsible by declaring ourselves, I agree. We must immediately stop using the phrase "no one can speak for the Disciples of Christ" as an excuse for refusing to articulate our theologies. The terrible truth is that the phrase "no one can speak for the Disciples of Christ" is often used by a man to justify his silence and the real cause of the silence is the fact that he has nothing to say!

For our own good, as well as out of respect for others, we are duty bound to state our case. But for the Disciples, this has never meant anything that approximates a creed or even a church covenant. We do believe that we are duty bound to confess our Lord, but by this we have meant no more than the Good Confession by which we enter the church. We have not meant that we should use a creed. And whether Article II in the *Basis of Union* constitutes a creed or not is a moot question. The confession included in the article reads as follows:

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Saviour, who for us and our salvation lived and died and rose again and lives for evermore; and in the Holy Spirit, who takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, renewing, comforting, and inspiring the souls of men. We acknowledge one holy catholic church, the innumerable company of those who, in every age and nation, are united by the Holy Spirit to God in Christ, are one body in Christ, and have communion with Him and with one another. We acknowledge as part of this universal fellowship all throughout the world who profess this faith in Jesus Christ and follow Him as Lord and Saviour.

There is more of the confession which we shall mention later, but for the moment we must pause to point out a real ambiguity in the *Basis of Union* regarding the status in the church of this confession of faith. Within the confession itself appears the statement, "We acknowledge as part of this universal fellowship all throughout the world who profess this faith in Jesus Christ." This would seem therefore to be a strict definition of church membership. However, a footnote reads that this confession is designed to be a testimony and not a test of faith. That would seem to give some comfort, but at the outset of the *Basis* there is a statement which says

that footnotes are explanatory, designed to throw light on the text, but are not part of the *Basis of Union*. In other words, the text of the *Basis* takes precedence over the footnotes. It is true that another article says that an important duty of the General Synod will be to convene a Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith, and that this statement is to be a testimony and not a test. But in that instance the qualification is stated in the text of the *Basis*, not in a footnote. In the earlier Article on Faith it is the profession of *this* faith which is the basis of acknowledgement of members of the universal fellowship of the church. There is still another Article, No. VII, which defines membership in the United Church of Christ. It reads:

All persons who are members of either communion at the time of the union shall be members of the United Church. Men, women, and children shall be admitted into the fellowship of the United Church through baptism and profession of faith according to the custom and usage of each congregation prior to the union. When they shall have been admitted they shall be recognized as members of the United Church.

Now this in a real sense only adds confusion, because we now have one standard for membership in the universal fellowship of the one holy catholic church, and another basis for membership in the congregations of the United Church.

It is not our purpose in pointing out the ambiguities in the *Basis of Union* to throw up road blocks to merger. Any one familiar with the United Church of Christ at the present time knows that it is characterized by a breadth of Spirit inclusive in its mood. But time can bring changes and another Spirit can read other meanings into the materials that have been prepared. The difficulty with confessions of faith is that while they may unite, they can also be used to divide.

There is something amazingly neat and appealing about the Disciple position; for individual church membership we require a sample confession of faith, usually the Petrine formula from Caesarea Philippi, and for constitutional usage we refer to the whole New Testament as such. In between the Good Confession and the New Testament there is nothing we feel we have to have, constitutionally speaking, for our brotherhood as a whole, though most of us feel that local congregations should have specific constitu-

tions. To be frank about it, the proposal for merger with the United Church raises the issue of the Disciple position versus the more confessionalistic position taken by the United Church.

In an article entitled "Ecumenical Dilemmas of Disciples of Christ" in a recent issue of the *Scroll*, I pointed out that there has not been a single merger effected in this century which has not been accompanied by an articulate confession of faith. This fact certainly challenges our traditional Disciple idea that creeds are divisive and therefore unnecessary. The last sixty years of ecclesiastical history proves that there are some kinds of unity that are helped by precise confession. Certainly all of the mergers in this century have used them. But it may also be that there are areas of unity which would be hindered by a requirement of confessional unity, and it may be we Disciples intuitively understand this. The validity of a certain theological vagueness may be that it safeguards the roads to kinds of unity which would be hindered by too much confessional statement. The evidence so far is that the whole contemporary conciliar movement with its rapidly expanding councils and federations is possible precisely when bases of unity are stated in only the most general and fewest possible terms.

The issue between the historic Disciple position and the more confessionalistic position taken by the United Church is most sharply felt when one turns to the minutes of the first meeting, held October 24 and 25, 1957, at Pittsburgh, of the Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith for the United Church of Christ. The minutes of the meeting are enough to make us realize that it was a very different kind of meeting from any ever held under Disciples auspices. The content of the meeting was a discussion of the Savoy Declaration, the Westminster Confession, the Kansas City Creed of 1913, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, Luther's two catechisms, the recent Batak Creed, the Barmen Declaration, and the Confessions of the United Church of Canada and the Church of South India. It may be to our shame, but the content of that meeting is not a content which Disciples could discuss with any feeling of "at homeness." But the question of the significance of these historical materials to the United Church is ambiguous. It is my understanding that following the meeting dealing with these historic Confessions, the Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith did not proceed to work out a Statement of Faith by setting these historic creeds one against the

other and finding the general confession that could be drawn from them. It proceeded by adjourning with instructions to the delegates to write out their own confessions or suggestions for confessions. At the next meeting, work was started on the preparation of a Statement of Faith not by the comparison of historic creeds but by comparing the suggestions prepared by the delegates!

While the proposal of merger with the United Church of Christ squarely raises the question of the adequacy or inadequacy of our traditional Disciple attitude toward creeds and confessions of faith, it equally raises the question of just what is the attitude of the United Church of Christ toward creeds and confessions and particularly with respect to the historic statements.

In any event, the kind of interest expressed in the very formation of a Commission on a Statement of Faith ought to send the Disciples back for some restudy of their fundamental documents. We actually have little idea of the kinds of documents which had nourished Thomas Campbell's mind before he published the *Declaration and Address*. As we approach the sesquicentennial of that publication it would be good to remind ourselves that a thorough literary-source and historical-context study of that document is long over-due. As we become familiar with the sources and phrases and concepts that appear in the *Declaration and Address*, I believe we may be surprised to discover how many of them came from the Westminster Confession, the Savoy Declaration and other such documents. Such studies may help us to see ourselves in relation to the United Church of Christ and may help us to decide whether or not we want to further that relationship.

So far then we have identified the issues of the basis of church membership and the role of confessions in the church as issues rising out of the *Basis of Union* of the United Church of Christ and its recent conduct.

I should like now to return to Section II of the *Basis*, the section dealing with "Faith," and finish the quotation of the confession that appears in that section. I want to quote it because I like it. It is amazingly optimistic, not to say utopian, and that is something in this day of orthodox and eschatological pessimism. It is also openly admitted that this section of the *Basis of Union* is almost word for word from the Kansas City Creed, which is acknowledged as the high water mark of optimistic liberalism amongst Congregational-Christians. Here is that remaining text of the Confession.

We hold the Church to be established for calling men to repentance and faith, for the public worship of God, for the confession of His name by word and deed, for the administration of the sacraments, for witnessing to the saving grace of God in Christ, for the upbuilding of the saints, and for the universal propagation of the Gospel; and in the power of the love of God in Christ we labor for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the reign of peace, and the realization of human brotherhood.

Depending, as did our fathers, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the consummation of the Kingdom of God; and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and for the life everlasting.

As I have already said, for these kinds of words I have a real predilection.

The next section of the *Basis of Union* concerns "Practice." It raises two issues, the character of autonomy within the church as a whole, and the delegate principle.

The section on "Practice" envisions four levels of organization: Congregations; Associations (comparable to Disciple "districts"); Conferences (comparable to our state conventions); and the General Synod (comparable to our International Convention). The *Basis* in relation to these four levels asserts that the autonomy of each is respected in its own sphere, each having its own rights and responsibilities. I wish at this point that it were possible to believe everyone had read *Congregationalism* by Douglas Horton, but even if they had, the issue would not be quite as clear as I want to make it.

Historically there have been two distinct interpretations of what congregationalism is.

One of these asserts that all power and responsibility originates in the congregations: other elements of the church have power and responsibility only as the congregations have granted them that power and responsibility. This is the theory that usually is operative in those who insist that our state and international conventions should be conventions of the churches in order that the will of the churches can be carried out. *This is a very popular point of view among Disciples today, and it is precisely the point*

of view put forward by the Cadman group which sought to prevent the merger that resulted in the United Church of Christ!

The other theory of the meaning of congregational polity is the one which asserts that while the congregation has its own sphere of autonomy, every other level of church life has its own proper sphere of autonomy, and all of these must be safeguarded. This is the theory that is held by those Congregationalists who have furthered the merger; it is a theory as old as congregationalism itself and has been revived in our day by Douglas Horton and others. There is not time at this point to develop this theory in detail. All that can be done is to say that it refutes both the idea that there is some central power such as papacy or episcopacy from which all power derives, and the idea that all power derives from congregations. In other words, it refutes both the top-down and the bottom-up theories of power and authority by asserting the emergence of new powers, responsibilities, and authority at every level of organization as that level of organization comes into being. The fact that the United Church of Christ accepts this moderate definition of congregational polity rather than the radical congregationalism which is so very wide-spread amongst the Disciples of Christ raises a very sharp issue for us as we contemplate merger with the United Church of Christ. The position of the United Church implies far more freedom than the typical Disciple is likely to want to grant for such units as UCMS, Board of Church Extension, and all other agencies, and certainly far, far more than our independents, who represent the most extreme possible form of congregationalism, would accord.

The second issue raised by the section on Practice is the delegate issue. The article on Practice calls for the formation of Associations, Conferences and General Synod by a process of delegation which originates at the level of the local congregations. Now Disciples of Christ have never believed that delegation is the way in which their wider conventional bodies should be constituted. To be sure, on two occasions in the past they have voted for a delegate national convention. But they didn't believe in it and they never put their vote into practice. They popularly nullified the Louisville Plan in 1870 and the Toronto delegate Convention of 1914. Commentators usually say that we were too young to put into practice what we had voted. But there have been many smaller and younger bodies than ours which have used the delegate system to constitute their wider bodies. My own appraisal is that dele-

gate conventions among Disciples of Christ have failed in the past because intuitively we recognize that from our point of view another method of constituting wider bodies is preferable. Indeed, if, with our theory of congregationalism we had coupled delegate conventions, our agencies would have been throttled beyond belief. The United Church can afford delegate conventions because it has already asserted in other ways the autonomy that exists at every level. Under this theory when a delegate is named to a convention, his proper function is to exercise the autonomy relative to that convention. He does not come to the convention to endow it with power which is supposed to have its source in the local congregation. Disciples have tenaciously held to the theory that the local congregation is the origin of all powers in our communion. Our agencies have been able to exercise their rightful autonomy just because membership in the convention has not been of the delegate character. At the present moment we are seeing once again at the state levels the voting-in of delegate conventions. It will be interesting to see whether these delegate conventions are actually made operative or whether once again Disciples eventually nullify their votes and maintain conventions of the popular assembly type.

The nature of church membership, the role of confessions, the nature of autonomy, and the delegate issue have so far been identified.

A further issue has to do with the relationship between congregations and ministers. Here we touch the item which has historically been the *sine qua non* of congregational polity, namely, the right of congregations to choose their own ministry. It is therefore important to look squarely at the fact that the United Church of Christ intends to abandon this position. True, the *Basis of Union* asserts that "ministers and churches desiring to maintain a system of pastoral placement in which the Conference or Association shall have little or no part, shall be free to do so; but the recommended standard of denominational procedure shall be one in which the minister, Congregation, and Conference or Association co-operate, the Conference or Association approving candidates, the Congregation extending and minister accepting the call." The kinds of responsibility in this last sentence should be noticed. Association "approves" candidates for pulpits; the congregation "extends" and the minister "accepts" the call. Furthermore, the *Basis* asserts, "The new communion will appeal to all Congregations not to call or dismiss their ministers, and to

all ministers not to respond to calls or resign, until the Association or Conference shall have given approval." I am not familiar enough with ways in which such corporate entities as Associations or Conference are able to carry on the business of dealing with dispatch with such matters of human interest as will be involved in the matters of dismissals and resignations, but it is perfectly clear that *the full and expressed intent of the United Church is to lodge the authority regarding placement at some levels other than the Congregation*. Notice for instance the sentence in the *Basis* which reads, ". . . the formal induction of a minister into his parish, which is recommended as normal procedure, shall be by authority of the Conference or Association at the request of the Congregation." The Congregation "requests" but authority belongs to the Conference. The Association approves candidates for pulpits; the authority to induct a minister into his pulpit lies with the Association. This is the normal procedure which the United Church intends to establish, calling all to follow this path. It is a little ironic as one gets to the end of the article on Ministers and Congregations to read the tag sentence which says, "In all relationships between minister and local church or Congregation the freedom of the minister and the autonomy of the church are presupposed." Personally, I think that last sentence of the article robs it of honesty. It would have been honest to say "We are abandoning the historic Congregational polity which asserts the right of each Congregation to choose its ministry." It is not honest to re-echo shibboleths about freedom of the minister and the autonomy of the congregation.

In order to be clear about the matter of the relationship of the ministry to congregations and associations, we must point out that certain new trends among Disciples of Christ have proceeded very rapidly. Most importantly, state Commissions on the Ministry (not unlike Associations) are increasingly amongst Disciples the bodies which approve ordinations. In this respect our practice is rapidly becoming similar to that of the United Church of Christ, to Presbyterian bodies, and even to Episcopal bodies. Ordination has now virtually become the work of Associations or Commissions composed of ministers and lay folk. But ordination is something other than ministerial placement. Ordination at the associational level does restrict the total number of men who may be available for the consideration of a local congregation as it seeks to fill its pulpit. But that fact does not deny the principle of the right of

a local congregation to choose its own ministry. It is the latter issue which is the crucial one. There are also a few places amongst Disciples of Christ where the selection of the minister for a local pulpit has fallen into the hands of some agency. Even within their own ranks, Disciples of Christ could deal with the issue of the right of a congregation to select its own ministry. If Disciples would deal with this issue as they themselves confront it, the discussion would help to determine whether merger with the United Church of Christ is a desirable prospect.

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly there are other issues than those pointed out involved in any proposal of merger of the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ. At two points in particular there are very grave issues for the Disciples. The United Church of Christ is obviously leaving the ground of historic congregational polity with respect to the relations between congregation and minister. Since Disciples have occupied that same ground, we will have to ask deep and searching questions if we are asked to decide whether we wish to merge with a church that has taken other ground. Even more important, by entering the United Church of Christ, historic congregationalism has taken a long, long step toward that kind of confessionalism that has always been more characteristic of continental theology than of Anglo-Saxon divinity, especially in its American expressions. Perhaps this is a shift in the right direction. Perhaps we Disciples have been wrong in believing that Christianity ought to "travel light" theologically speaking, except for the Good Confession and the New Testament. The possibility of merger with the United Church does raise issues which are close to the center of our Disciple existence as it has so far been lived. We cannot contemplate such a merger on the basis of enthusiasm for Christian unity alone. We can only do it by bringing our critical faculties into play, and that may be very good for us.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the least the world might expect of the Church before it can believe? Is a universality or unity of spirit enough?
2. What is involved in organic union? Does it necessarily mean uniformity of structure? of faith? of practice? subservience to the "monolith"?
3. Are "organic" and "covenantal" unity mutually exclusive? What are the dimensions of each?
4. For what reasons should Disciples be involved in merger negotiations? What are the limits of such negotiations?
5. Can congregational-type polity be identified with freedom and "associational-type" polity with "unfreedom?" How do these polities actually affect the members of several churches in their faith? In their social action and world responsibility?
6. How have Disciples changed their notion of the ministry in recent years? Should a local congregation have in itself the power to ordain? For responsible ministerial placement, what relationship should prevail as between congregations and as between local church and Church universal?
7. If Disciples were to describe a simple "basis for merger" to serve as starting point for negotiations with other communions, what are the specific essentials to be included? Do these describe our concept of the marks of the Church? Our practices of the life of the Church?

DISCIPLES' WITNESS AND INVOLVEMENTS ABROAD

By JOSEPH M. SMITH

I. THE PAST: FROM UNITY AS MISSION TO MISSION IN UNITY

UNITY was the avowed mission which brought the Disciples into being. "Our Plea" was addressed to a divided Christendom and this has meant that a sense of mission to the non-Christian world was not part of our reason for coming into existence as a people. Not only did the preoccupation with unity as their mission orient Disciples toward the Christian world but their conviction that unity was to be achieved by restoration of the New Testament pattern proved to be still a further road-block in the way of Disciple participation in the mission to the non-Christian world. Ironically, however, their tardy and indifferent participation in the world mission has confronted Disciples with the severest judgment they have yet had both upon their commitment to unity and upon Restoration as the path to unity.

According to Dr. A. W. Fortune there have been "four distinct stages in the historic position of the Disciples on union and all these stages have been carried over into the present." First, the leaders were undenominational in thought and action and had no intention of forming another denomination. Second, a definite program was formulated to bring about union through the restoration of New Testament Christianity as the Disciples themselves conceived it. In the third stage they sought cooperation with other denominations. Dr. Fortune concludes:

Now (1942) we have entered the fourth stage in the development of our attitude toward Christian unity. . . . We are beginning to feel that we must embrace every opportunity to put into practice the unity about which we have been preaching. (*Adventuring with Disciples Pioneers*, pp. 20-21.)

In the earliest stage of their development Disciple preoccupation with preaching unity to Christendom precluded any concern for foreign missions. In this respect they were merely repeating the experience of a majority of the earlier Protestant reformers who were either not interested in foreign missions or openly opposed

to them. Alexander Campbell held during the 1820's that the effort to convert the world by modern missionaries was a Scripturally unauthorized and hence hopeless task. In 1825 he wrote:

We might as reasonably expect that Indian corn will grow in the open fields as that Pagan nations can be converted to Jesus Christ, till Christians are united through belief of the apostles' testimony.

Unity must be achieved before missions could be undertaken.

In the period when most Disciples seemed to believe that the unity of the church would come about through "restoration of simple New Testament Christianity" they began to engage in foreign missions on a very limited scale. However, their conception of New Testament unity helped to prevent any general support of missions on the one hand and shaped the character of such limited foreign missions as were undertaken on the other. "Ecclesiastophobia" with its emphasis upon the absolute autonomy of the local congregation prevented effective organization on a wide scale for participation in foreign missions. The early Disciple missionary organizations were associations of interested individuals who were careful not to presume to act for the "church." Pathetically lacking as they were in representative authority or general support the societies were attacked by hostile Disciples as being in themselves a "sin." Eventually, the furtherance of the world mission through agencies established by interested individuals became a major occasion for, if not a chief cause of, division among the protagonists of New Testament unity—a division climaxed in the separation of the Church of Christ from the Disciples in 1906.

Almost seventy-five years elapsed after the Declaration and Address was written before Disciples began permanent missions in distinctly non-Christian lands. Aside from the brief and ill-fated effort in Liberia, all the early overseas evangelistic projects were in lands where a Christian community had existed for centuries. Foreign missions were merely an extension of the witness to Christendom in the sense that they were a part of the effort to "take the world for New Testament Christianity." As late as 1880 all five of the Disciples' overseas missions were in traditionally Christian lands and most of the meagre mission funds were being spent in England—the country which was giving more "every year for the support of foreign missions than any other nation on the face of the globe." When Disciple missions were finally begun in the

non-Christian lands the action stemmed not so much from a new insight into the nature of New Testament Christianity as from the fact that other religious bodies were increasingly active in carrying the Gospel to "the heathen" and "our people" should not be doing less than "the denominations." Hence, the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw most of the present Disciple foreign missions fields occupied often without any apparent regard for the fact that others were already at work in the same places. The aim was to plant a mission of the Disciples of Christ in the heart of each great non-Christian land.

The testimony of foreign missions experience soon made it clear that "the evangelization of the world . . . is the most colossal task ever undertaken by men." Disciple missionaries and mission administrators saw that the magnitude of the task, if nothing else, demanded cooperation with other Christian bodies. Thus, missionaries and mission churches entered into comity agreements, established union institutions and seriously considered the possibility of mutual recognition of membership and organic union with other Christian groups before these steps became live options among Disciples on the home front. Because they pioneered in these ventures in unity missionaries and missionary societies bore the brunt of criticism directed against such actions by those Disciples who were not prepared to recognize "the denominations" as belonging to the church of Christ and were unwilling to admit that unity could come by any other way than restoration of Disciple-interpreted New Testament Christianity. The early ventures in ecumenical membership in churches in the Philippine Islands and China and the suggestion that Disciples might participate in union negotiations in China with Congregationalists, Presbyterians and other non-immersionist and non-congregational bodies precipitated the bitter controversies of the early 1920's that seemed for a time to threaten the very existence of the infant United Christian Missionary Society. The controversy, climaxing as it did in the Oklahoma City Convention resolution calling for the dismissal of all United Society employees who were "committed to a belief in open membership," put up a permanent caution sign against any Disciple participation in union negotiations and until very recently served as a stop sign against Disciples missionaries initiating or even participating in efforts looking toward Disciple involvement in organic union.

In spite of strong opposition Disciple support of cooperation with other religious bodies in the conduct of the world mission continued and expanded. As early as 1938 the United Christian Missionary Society could report that "more than 95 percent of all our foreign mission work is on a non-competitive basis and much of it is done in active cooperation." A single striking example of the extent of cooperation at the present time is the fact that all the younger churches associated with the United Christian Missionary Society train their ministry in union seminaries.

However, internal disunity, both at home and abroad, has plagued and occasionally nearly paralyzed the Disciples' growing participation in cooperation. "Independent" and "direct-support" Disciple missions have come into being on all the major fields where the United Society has work and in other countries as well. Even in overwhelmingly non-Christian lands these missions are sectarian and divisive in that they are directed both to the "denominational" Christians and to the non-Christians.

The younger churches have led the Disciples into the fourth stage in Dr. Fortune's outline where "we have begun to practice the unity about which we have been preaching." In the Philippine Islands and in Japan pressure from a military regime and the temporary end of support and administrative contact from abroad during World War Two combined with the earnest desire of national Christians for unity to effect Disciple membership in united churches. When it became clear in 1955 that our Disciple brethren (with the exception of the Tagalog churches in the Philippines) intended to stay in these unions the church at home was faced with the decision whether fellowship with these former Disciples in the nature of continuing missionary support should continue. The Commission of Friendly Inquiry sent to investigate and make recommendations on this point concluded its report with the statement:

We are faced with a decision that will test the validity of our prayers and preachments in behalf of Christian union for a century and a half. God is presenting to us in concrete form an open door of opportunity to fulfill our purpose and to realize our dreams and hopes. This is our day of decision under God's impending judgment.

When the recommendation of the Commission for continuing fellowship and support completely within the framework of the

United churches was adopted by the Board of Managers of the United Society, the Disciples of Christ, for the first time in their history, sanctioned through an official agency participation in an actual church union.

Garrison and DeGroot sum up the contribution of missions to unity among Disciples of Christ in the following way:

Nothing else has done so much to 'build a brotherhood' and create a sense of unity among Disciples of Christ as has their cooperation in missionary work—using that term in its broadest sense. Moreover, nothing else has done so much to quicken their awareness that their 'brotherhood' is a part of a larger brotherhood embracing all Christ's followers and that every local church is a part of *the church*. Disciples of Christ in America have done much for missions, but missions have done more for them . . . In facing the world's total need and taking stock of Christian resources available to meet it Disciples have been led to a better understanding of their own movement and the scope and richness of the whole enterprise. (*The Disciples of Christ—A History*, p. 514.)

Despite their contribution to missions and their debt to missions, the Disciples' "mission" remains a mission to Christendom. Perhaps it is because they have failed to develop a full consciousness of *the* mission of the church to the world that Disciples have made such a poor record in the fulfillment of their own special mission, dividing among themselves over the issue of how mission is to be conducted, as well as of how unity is to be achieved. Meanwhile, other Protestant bodies have moved far ahead of Disciples in their achievements in unity and mission, both at home and abroad.

II. THE PRESENT: NEW PROBLEMS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Disciples' contemporary involvement in the ecumenical movement and witness abroad is marked on the one hand by factors which underline the urgent necessity of greater unity among Christians and on the other by trends which seem to run counter to growth toward genuine unity. It is now generally recognized that the existing churches must be the center of the continuing witness in non-Christian lands. At the same time, it is clear that this church which is a numerically insignificant minority whose members belong often to the poorest classes in poverty-stricken

lands simply does not possess the resources to evangelize its non-Christian environment. The facts make it clear that *only* the whole church is equipped to take the whole Gospel to the whole world. Therefore, the younger churches are organizing on a regional basis across denominational lines as in the East Asia Conference of Christians and requesting the support and cooperation of the Western church in personnel and money within the framework of an evangelistic enterprise that is genuinely ecumenical. Leaders from the younger churches, especially the church in Asia, have spearheaded the movement to integrate the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. Inter-church aid in which Disciples have participated in many forms, but notably through support of relief and reconstruction programs of established churches, illustrates the growing importance of this type of relationship with our brethren of other communions overseas—a relationship which is clearly an expression of the unity of all Christ's followers, uncompromised by any hidden motives of extending Discipledom through proselytism.

On almost all missions fields the growing nationalism and resentment against continuing white, Western dominance combined with the resurgent power of dominant non-Christian faiths or a re-awakened and belligerent Roman Catholicism emphasize the absolute necessity of a Protestant Christian witness that is truly united and indigenous. The need for a more adequately trained national Christian leadership and the further need for a Christian literature suited to various levels of intellectual attainment and for statements of the Christian faith clothed in the cultural heritage of the people are merely significant examples of the manifold demands confronting the younger churches. The Christian community can hope to answer these demands in any reasonably adequate measure only by uniting all its pitifully limited resources of leadership and finance in a common effort. These are only some of the factors which explain the firmness with which Japanese and Filipino Disciples declared their intention of remaining in the united churches. They suggest, too, why Disciples in Mexico and India enter union negotiations with a sense of earnest urgency. A recent publication of the Africa Committee of the Division of Foreign Missions asserts:

There are strong indications that the traditional pattern of missionary activity whereby a particular sponsoring board sends out its missionaries to serve a specific geo-

graphical sector, independently of any other Christian body, is no longer adequate. Few areas remain unoccupied; the geographical frontier of missionary advance is closing, just as the American frontier closed a generation ago with profound social effects. But the absence of new 'unoccupied' fields does not signify the end of outreach or of need. Africa's new cities, for example, present a lively challenge. But to attempt to meet it in the old way, by the introduction of increasing numbers of unrelated missionary bodies is to court failure. (*Advance in Africa*, p. 20.)

Seemingly running counter to these manifestations of the urgent demand for and the growing achievement of unity are other factors in the contemporary picture whose significance is as yet undetermined. The trend toward world confessionalism expressed most noticeably in such organizations as the Lutheran World Federation and Baptist World Alliance moves on apace. Disciples reflect this trend in their organization of the World Convention of Churches of Christ (Disciples). "Direct-support" missionaries of the Christian Church and representatives of the Brazil Christian Mission and the Christian Missionary Fellowship increase in numbers and contribute to a divided and divisive witness. In some cases, such groups and their representatives place in jeopardy the continuance of the missionary enterprise from abroad especially in countries where a growing nationalism makes all foreigners suspect, particularly those engaged primarily in "evangelism." The activity of the European Evangelistic Society and of Church of Christ missionaries in Europe often confuses and hampers the Disciples' fellowship with churches to which we are related through the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical enterprises. In still other cases, as in South Africa, the United Christian Missionary Society through assuming the support of an enterprise which is largely the result of earlier work by independent missionaries, finds itself in the ambiguous position of supporting the development of a relatively new Disciples' movement in an area which had been adequately occupied for decades by Christian groups with whom we are organically united in other parts of the world.

The question as to how missions shall be conducted and the aim toward which they shall be directed is apparently producing still another schism within Disciples in the United States. This

is the appearance of "Church of Christ, Number Two" which, according to A. T. DeGroot, arises in large part out of differences regarding the conduct of missions. We must conclude that Disciple participation in the Christian world mission continues to be contradictory and ambivalent—greater cooperation and unity on the one hand and increasing division on the other; on the one side participation in organic unions and conversations looking toward further unions while on the other confessionalism grows stronger and sectarianism flourishes in some quarters. Lack of any clearly developed or generally accepted theology of mission which would guide Disciples in an understanding of the fundamental aim of the world mission and illuminate the conduct of our world mission remains a basic contributing factor in this contradictory ambivalence. Disciples do not yet possess a sense of mission which orients them toward that world for whose sake it was Christ's prayer "that they might be one."

III. THE FUTURE: PROSPECTS AND POSSIBILITIES

Some of the unsolved problems and unanswered questions which await Disciples' study and action may be grouped around four developments growing out of our participation in the world mission and in the world Christian fellowship. They are:

1. The parallel growth of the sense of belonging to an inclusive world church and of world confessionalism.
2. Disciple membership in united churches in Japan, Philippines and Thailand.
3. Disciple participation in conversations looking toward union in Jamaica, Mexico and India.
4. The growing understanding that both mission and unity belong to the essence of the church and that this insight must be expressed in the organization and strategy of the world mission.

1. The growing awareness that there exists now a world Christian community transcending denomination, race and nation is accompanied by the emergence of a vital world confessionalism. These two developments which are often in tension if not direct opposition to each other, confront the Disciples with a series of practical decisions all of which imply basic theological presuppositions. For example, some missionary leaders are proposing that increasing resources be placed in the development of such ecumenical teams as that now at work in Nepal. These efforts would be

free from the onus of Western superiority feelings and ecclesiastical imperialism which many nations, including Christians, associate with the very word "missionary." They would be concrete expressions of the insight that it is "the task of the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world." The commissioning in 1956 of Miss Itoko Maeda to serve as an "ecumenical missionary" with the United Church of Christ in Okinawa is one example of such an ecumenical mission. Disciples must face the question as to how far they are prepared to support and further this type of witness in contrast to the more distinctly denominational types of endeavor.

In common with other participants in the ecumenical movement Disciples are supporting the program of inter-church aid which expresses the reality of unity beyond denominationalism, while at the same time we strengthen world denominational ties through the World Convention of Churches of Christ. The fraternal ministry to the British Churches of Christ and the mission to South Africa express the Disciples' sense of special concern for and relationship to fellow-Disciples throughout the world. But Disciples of Christ must decide what is the relationship between ecumenical fellowship and inter-church aid on the one hand and world confessionalism on the other and what is the relative emphasis which they are to place on each.

2. The existence of united churches in Thailand, Japan and the Philippine Islands to which Disciples belong raises the question as to the continuing relationship between such churches and the Disciples segment within them and Disciples of Christ in the rest of the world. Dr. Henry Pitt Van Dusen declares that:

World denominationalism, far from being a logical and natural development in this era of world consciousness is an utter anachronism, a historical absurdity, an attempt to revive on a world scale a species already extinct and reverently but happily interred within their areas (that is, areas where a united church exists).

Do Disciples of Christ accept this as an accurate analysis of the situation in those countries where united churches exist? Disciples also need to inquire whether our union with Congregationalists, Presbyterians and other denominations in the lands of the younger churches furnishes any guidance in the furtherance of closer relationships with these same bodies in the United States and the rest of the world.

3. Disciple participation in continuing union negotiations in India, Jamaica and Mexico raises the question as to what kind of theological guidance, if any, Disciples of Christ generally, and in the United States specifically, have to offer to fellow-Disciples engaged in such conversations. In the booklet, *Strategy of World Missions*, it is stated that we must enable churches engaged in such negotiations to "see the eternal values we deem important in Disciple witness. We must guide our churches as they seek to participate in such plans of union so they may continue their witness." It then presents a statement of the elements which the Division of World Mission of the United Christian Missionary Society considers basic to any consideration of the merger of our younger churches into a union movement. They are:

- a) *The right of decision.* The Society acknowledges that the church on the mission field has the right of decision. By this we mean the principle of the autonomy of the local church is applicable in the mission lands as well as to the church at home.
- b) *The need of continuing fellowship.* The churches of the mission field were brought into being by the churches of the Disciples of Christ in the United States and Canada who feel responsible for their future development and nurture. It is important, therefore, that any merger of the churches thus established into a union church should entail an effort to preserve the continuing fellowship with their parent body through the years ahead.
- c) *The tradition of freedom.* The Disciples' tradition of freedom from ecclesiastical control and from binding creedal statements is very precious to our people and must be preserved.
- d) *The continuing witness.* In all considerations of unity the churches must see clearly the necessity of the continuing witness to the simple tenets of Disciples faith and practice . . . The continued witness of the simple approach of man to God and the reliance of the Christian upon the Bible as his guide and the use of the Bible as a basis of church membership is too valuable a contribution to world Christianity to be lost.

- e) *Attitude of other communions.* It will be necessary to explore the attitude of other communions participating in such union movements as to finance, personnel and administration to discover whether their intention is to build up a permanent union program to achieve a United Church, or whether it is their intention to maintain denominational control.

The statement continues with a delineation of the basic policy which grows out of these considerations and has been accepted by the United Society as its guide in these circumstances. Some of the points in this policy are:

- 1) Recognize that the younger churches in our mission fields are rapidly reaching maturity of thought and action and, as such, are autonomous; that our relationship is changing from mission direction to partnership in the witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 2) Acknowledge that the autonomy of the local church has no geographical boundaries and recognize that the function of the United Christian Missionary Society to counsel with and serve local churches in the expression of their ecumenical concern for Christians of all communions is the same for churches at home and abroad.
- 3) Recognize that when movements of church union arise on the field the missionaries of The United Christian Missionary Society may participate with national leaders in the formative processes of such movements.
- 4) Face with the churches of the Disciples of Christ on the field where plans of union are under discussion the problems of doctrine and practice inherent in various plans of church union and agree to a procedure that will frankly state our position and the extent to which participation is possible and desirable.
- 5) Agree that The United Christian Missionary Society has continuing responsibility in the maintenance of fellowship with and support of churches of the Disciples of Christ on the mission field which, as autonomous churches, enter movements of organic union.

While it is clear that this statement is intended only for use by the United Society in establishing policy and strategy it does serve as a statement of issues to which responsible Disciples of Christ everywhere are bound to give serious thought. It needs to be asked whether this is an adequate and comprehensive summary of the guidance which Disciples have to offer members of their communion who are engaged in union negotiations anywhere in the world.

Additional items which are set forth as basic policy in the United Society's statement assert that in any consideration of plans of union the Division of World Mission will explore fully the possibility of "continuing Disciple witness" in such areas as "The extent of local autonomy; The issue of legalistic creed; The structure of ecclesiastical control." It further declares that the Disciples of Christ seek expression for the following freedoms in any plan of organic union on the mission field:

- a) The freedom of the congregation to witness to the basic character of the Christian faith.
- b) The freedom of the congregation to refuse a creed as a test of fellowship.
- c) The freedom of the congregation to determine the basis of church membership and the freedom to baptize by immersion.
- d) The freedom of the congregation to practice open communion.
- e) The freedom of the local congregation to call its own pastor.
- f) The freedom of the congregation to continue as an autonomous body.

Disciples of Christ everywhere need to examine each of these principles separately and as a totality and ask whether they represent adequately the full treasure which we have to bring to a united church. They need to be scrutinized, too, in terms of their relevance to the situation which characterizes the existence of the younger churches. We need to ask, for example, what meaning the "autonomy of the local church" possesses among younger churches where local congregations, almost without exception, have been more closely related to a central organization than has ever been the case among Disciples in the States. Similarly, the principles of the congregation as an autonomous body and free-

from ecclesiastical control need to be re-examined in the light of a new understanding of New Testament Christianity. It needs to be asked, likewise, whether the "continuing Disciple witness" within a united church is to be regarded as a right which is asked for former Disciples or whether it is to be regarded as an essential mark of the church itself. In this connection, Dr. M. Searle Bates asserts that historically, "efforts to put to the fore a distinctive Disciples emphasis have been artificial, sectarian and educationally difficult in mission situations." Will the effort to preserve "the distinctive Disciple witness" yield the same results in the area of union negotiations?

4. The approaching integration of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches is only one of the many manifestations of the growing conviction that both mission and unity belong to the essence of the church. The Willingen conference seriously raised the question of the place of missionary societies in an ecumenical era and asked whether the very existence of missionary societies which are not integrally related to the structure of the church is an anachronism if mission truly belongs to the essence of the church. *Is the present structure of the United Christian Missionary Society and its relationship to the brotherhood through the International Convention an adequate organizational expression of the principle that both mission and unity characterize a church? What bearing, if any, does this principle have upon Disciple recognition and support of "independent" missions?*

According to the United Society it "prefers to participate in cooperative enterprises in every instance where the cooperative project may do the more effective job." But the report of the Africa Committee referred to earlier declares:

Within the near future the question must be seriously faced both by the churches and the missions in Africa and by their supporting bodies whether Christian cooperation is a matter merely of convenience or of principle. The practice of working together and the agencies of cooperation have come into being for reasons of practical necessity. Such measure of belief as there has been in the virtue of cooperation would not have sufficed by itself to overcome the habit of thinking and acting in purely denominational terms. It must, in fact, be frankly recognized that the thought and action of Christians, both as individuals and as church and mission bodies still move

overwhelmingly in denominational channels. Cooperation is still peripheral rather than central . . . Protestantism's concept of the Church Universal remains remote and nebulous while the denomination is the operative body . . . The task before us therefore is not one primarily of strengthening the Christian Councils as operating agencies, important as that is. *Basically, it is the undergirding of the practice of cooperation with a more profound ethos.*

Disciples of Christ have a record for participation in cooperation for which they do not need to apologize. They have contributed notably to the leadership of the major organizations for cooperation in the Christian world mission. But now they are faced with the challenge of helping to undergird "the practice of cooperation with a more profound ethos" than that of practical considerations of efficiency and expediency. They are further challenged particularly by the situation in the lands of the younger churches to let it be known what they have to contribute to the movement beyond cooperation into unity. In the Belgian Congo, for example, Disciples enjoy their greatest numerical strength among the younger churches and there we are already part of a total Protestant community which uses the one name—Church of Christ in Congo. But the Church of Christ in Congo is really forty different missionary bodies, each developing its own pattern of church life. Are Disciples of Christ prepared to make a contribution commensurate with their numerical strength and their traditional commitment to the cause of Christian unity toward providing "the nominally united Church of Christ in Congo with a living structure?"

In ecumenical conversations within recent years Disciples of Christ have become painfully aware that we lack any comprehensive and clear understanding of the nature of the church. If the church *is* mission then it may be Disciples do not know what the church is because we have never seriously come to terms, in thought or action, with the mission of the church to the world. Now, however, our participation not only in the ecumenical movement generally, but our part in such missions in unity as that in Nepal, force Disciples to come to some understanding of what constitutes a church. As yet there has been no common agreement on the form and doctrine of the church which it is expected will eventually come from ecumenical witness such as that in Nepal. Are Disciples

developing a distinctive ecclesiology as a result of their participation in the ecumenical movement and a distinctive theology of mission through participation in the world mission? Or, is it becoming increasingly clear that a Biblical understanding of the church and of mission necessarily presupposes an ecumenical theology? If the latter is true then Disciples need to ask what they have to contribute to the development of such a theology as will undergird and guide our participation in efforts at unity and help to produce a greater degree of obedience to Christ in mission.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the Disciples' mission overseas? a Plea? a unique witness? a total Gospel?
2. What is the significance for Disciples generally of the fact that former Disciples are now participating members of united churches in Japan, the Philippines and Thailand? Does our relationship in organic union with former Presbyterians Congregationalists and others among the younger churches provide any guidance for future relationships with these bodies in the United States and elsewhere? If we should merge in North America, how can we maintain responsible ties with Disciples of other lands?
3. What guidance should Disciples of Christ as a world body provide for constituent members of their fellowship who enter union negotiations with other church bodies in specific areas? Do we need a Disciple equivalent of the Lambeth Quadrilateral? If such a statement is undertaken should our concern be with a distinctive Disciple witness or with the mark of the church in its wholeness?
4. What is the relationship between inter-church aid and ecumenical fellowship on the one hand and the strengthening of world Discipleship through the World Convention of the Churches of Christ on the other? Is there necessarily any conflict between the two emphases? Do we need a more clear cut definition of responsibilities and structural or organizational relationships in these areas?
5. What bearing does the insight that mission and unity belong to the nature of the church have upon the organizational structure of the Disciples of Christ? What and how can Disciples contribute to the development of a theology of mission? How can we contribute to the movement beyond cooperation into unity which is taking place among the younger churches?

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